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**ANTHONY ROBERT BOOTH**

***EPISTEMIC JUSTIFICATION AS A NORMATIVE CONCEPT***

**Ph.D. THESIS**

**2005**

**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY  
UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM**

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**16 JAN 2006**

ANTHONY ROBERT BOOTH

*EPISTEMIC JUSTIFICATION AS A NORMATIVE CONCEPT*

ABSTRACT

There is a way of talking about epistemic justification, that involves the notion of our being subject to epistemic *obligations* the failure to comply with makes us *blameworthy*, called the deontological conception. In this thesis, I defend the deontological conception against criticisms first levied by William Alston that it (a) implies doxastic voluntarism which is false and thereby violates the principle that ought implies can, and (b) is in tension with what is distinctive about the epistemic domain, namely its connection with the goal of believing truths and avoiding falsehoods. I argue that the extent to which (a) is problematic depends on the extent to which (b) is problematic. Further, that (b) is not problematic to the deontological conception if we view it not as a way to cash out epistemic justification, but as a way to understand normativity in general. I do this by making a distinction between merely evaluative and deontological levels of appraisal and that it is only in the latter that the notion of an obligation functions. I argue that it is nonsensical to use sortal terms at the level of obligations, (where obligations carry the notion of blameworthiness), i.e. that there cannot be obligations *from an epistemic point of view* anymore than there can be obligations *from an ethical point of view*. However, sortal terms can be used to distinguish between differing types of reasons (which, on their own, operate at the merely evaluative level), but because obligations only emerge out of a network of differing sorts of reasons, it does not make any sense to talk about different sorts of obligation. I strengthen that last claim up by arguing, against the evidentialist, that there are such things as non-epistemic reasons for belief

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## **PART ONE:**

### ***"Deontologism" and the Problem of Doxastic Voluntarism***

#### ***Introduction: Normativity, Merely Evaluative or Deontological?***

In this thesis I want to work out whether there is any sense in the claim that there are such things as particularly *epistemic* obligations, the sort of things involved in statements such as: "you *ought* to believe that the earth is flat"; "if you believe that  $p \rightarrow q$ , and you believe that  $p$ , then you ought to believe that  $q$ "; "you ought to seek more evidence when the evidence you have is insufficient to warrant your hypothesis". Now, there are probably many, many more of these sorts of examples, but my motivation here is not to try to explain the nature of this phenomenon and how it comes about, but, rather, to see how (and whether) it determines the arena of *justification*. For justification, be it of the epistemic or ethical variety, is often said to be a *normative* concept. Indeed, the most standing criticisms of Naturalism and Cognitivism are those that accuse these positions of failing to leave room for the normativity of justification<sup>1</sup>. To this end, the fact/value distinction is often invoked, for justification, we are told, purports to tell us something about what *ought* to be the case, it does not purport tell us anything significant about what *is* the case. Appeals to the fact/value distinction

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<sup>1</sup> Hence Moore's "open question argument". A classic example of an argument against naturalised epistemology which accuses it of failing to account for the normative dimension of epistemic justification is provided by Kim 1988. Blackburn 1984 and Gibbard 1990 argue that the issue of normativity is as problematic for cognitivists in epistemology as it is for cognitivists in ethics. As Frank Jackson puts it: "just as no amount of information couched in purely descriptive terms seems to close the question as to what it is morally right to do, so no amount of information couched in purely descriptive terms seems to close the question of what it is rational to believe or do" (Jackson 1999, p. 420). Jackson, however, in Jackson 1999, disagrees that this latter claim is correct; I will not dwell on this issue here.



will not yield all that is needed to establish the normativity of justification, however. This is because we can judge a belief or an action to have *value* without thereby judging that someone is *obliged* to possess that belief or commit that action. For example, about belief, William Alston says that “one can evaluate S’s believing that *p* as good, favourable, desirable without thinking of it as fulfilling or not violating an obligation” (Alston 1989 (a), p. 97). This surely has to be the case for action too: consider superogatory actions, for instance, which, although we can consider ethically superlative, we do not consider to have normative authority over agents, i.e. we would never consider it an *obligation* to commit a superogatory action. So the fact/value distinction is not the same distinction as that between is and ought. This consideration points us in the direction of the need for a three way distinction between descriptive, evaluative and normative statements: we can report putative facts (*descriptive* statements – e.g. “that is a blue car”), make value judgements which do not also make normative claims (*evaluative* statements – e.g. “that is a great car”) and we can make value judgements which do entail normative commitments (*normative* statements – e.g. “you really ought to buy that car”). Giving a correct normative negative appraisal entails that whom ever we are judging has failed to fulfil some relevant obligation and we consider this failure worthy of just reproach; conversely giving a correct positive normative appraisal entails that the person being appraised has not failed to fulfil the relevant obligations and hence is not blameworthy, but, instead, worthy of just praise. In other words, normative



appraisals are *action-compelling* (i.e. tell us something about what an agent is obliged to do) where merely evaluative appraisals may only ever be *action-guiding*. This follows if the principle that ought implies can is true, for we can make value-judgements about cars, for instance, without holding them responsible for whatever it is about them we are judging. Similarly, we may find the actions of a psychopath despicable without holding the psychopath responsible for their actions if they are not in control of what they are doing. We may also judge a subject's beliefs to be radically ill-founded, but not hold the subject responsible for holding those beliefs if there was nothing they could have done to believe otherwise. Of course, normative appraisals are always also evaluative, and merely evaluative as well as normative appraisals may always also be descriptive, but no type of appraisal is reducible to another.

It may seem uncontroversial to claim that when philosophers say that justification is a normative concept in modern ethics, they mean that when we determine whether an act is justified (give ethical appraisal)<sup>2</sup> we are giving *normative* as opposed to merely evaluative (in the way defined above) ethical appraisal. Things look a bit less clear in contemporary epistemology, however. Some epistemologists seem to say that justification is a normative concept, for

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this section, because I engage with authors whose preference in words differ; I will use the phrases "justification" and "appraisal" interchangeably. So when I say that appraisal is a normative concept, I do not mean that the rules by which appraisal is given are normative (though they very well may be too), but that giving favourable or negative appraisal (i.e. attributing justification or not) entails holding the subject responsible, blameworthy if not justified, not blameworthy if justified.

instance, whilst criticising Quine's "naturalised epistemology", Jaegwon Kim writes:

..justification manifestly is normative. If a belief is justified for us, then it is *permissible* and *reasonable*, from the epistemic point of view, for us to hold it, and it would be *epistemically irresponsible* to hold beliefs that contradict it. (Kim 1988, p. 267)

This passage suggests that for Kim epistemic justification is a normative and not merely evaluative concept, for it intimates that belief is something over which we can be held "responsible". However, one may judge a belief to be epistemically irresponsible without holding the bearer of that belief responsible (and blameworthy) for holding it if (under the principle that ought implies can) they could not have believed otherwise. Further Kim does not differentiate between normative/evaluative/descriptive but only between "the descriptive vs. normative divide" (Kim 1988, p. 278), so there is nothing to prevent a reading of Kim that interpreted his use of "normative" as we have defined "evaluative". Other epistemologists appear to consider epistemic justification a merely evaluative concept, for instance, Susan Haack writes:

The concept of justification is an *evaluative* concept, one of a whole mesh of concepts for the *appraisal* of a person's epistemic state. To say that a person is justified in some belief of his, is, in so far forth, to make a favourable appraisal of his epistemic state. (Haack 1993, p. 12)

However, because Haack does nowhere make the distinction between normative and evaluative concepts, there is nothing inconsistent with our reading her "evaluative" as our "normative" – making an accurate unfavourable appraisal of someone's epistemic state entails thinking them blameworthy for having it. So

although epistemologists may appear not to be converging on what sort of a concept epistemic justification is, it is more likely that lack of convergence is due to an ambiguity that arises from epistemologists not taking notice of the normative/evaluative/descriptive distinction; not because they do not think there is such a distinction, I suggest, but because they do not consider much to turn on it. However, in this thesis, I hope to show that it is important to bear this distinction in mind when considering what we mean by epistemic justification being a normative concept.

To say that epistemic justification is a normative concept can then mean two things: (i) it can mean that when we do or do not grant epistemic justification on a subject's holding a belief, we are saying something about whether or not that subject has believed what they were *obliged* to; or (ii) it can mean that we are evaluating that subject holding that belief positively or negatively according to a particular standard or norm but not thereby saying anything about whether they have done what they were obliged to. The view that epistemic justification involves the normativity described in (i) is usually termed the *deontological conception of epistemic justification*. The view expressed by (ii) is usually characterised, then, as being non-deontological. Most of this thesis is concerned with the deontological conception, since it is concerned with the question of whether it makes sense to say that such things as epistemic obligations can determine the question of what is involved in epistemic justification. In Chapter 1, I discuss the deontological conception in more detail. I consider its relationship

with epistemic internalism and raise some doubts as to whether “deontologism” cannot, after all, be compatible with a merely evaluative conception.

I then consider a problem with the deontic conception, first raised by William Alston in a variety of different papers. The first problem concerns the issue of whether we have control over our beliefs. This looks like a problem for the deontic conception because it looks like we may not have the right sort of control over our beliefs, and if the principle that ought implies can is true, then it looks like we cannot coherently hold that there are such things as obligations pertaining to beliefs. I discuss the issue of whether, and to what extent, we have control over our beliefs in Chapter 2, and exactly how this issue is problematic in Chapter 3. I also evaluate some potential solutions to this problem in Chapter 3 and argue that the best solution raises another difficult problem.

This second problem, also raised by Alston, I call the problem of “consilience failure”. Simply put, the problem is this: if epistemic justification is a deontological notion, then there are times when a subject can be epistemically justified but be believing in a way that is seemingly at odds with the epistemic aim of believing truth and avoiding falsehood. Chapter 4 is devoted to articulating how exactly this objection is supposed to work. In Chapter 5 I consider some potential responses to the problem of consilience failure and argue that the most promising of these responses is to invoke a sort of “tolerant pluralism” which denies that the truth goal is the only standard by which we can appraise belief. However, in examining the truth goal in Chapter 6, I argue that it

is the only thing that can give us some sense of what it is for an appraisal to be *epistemic*. The upshot of this consideration is that eschewing the truth goal as the only standard by which we can make epistemic appraisals, leaves us in the dark as to what it is that would make appraisals that did not appeal to the truth goal *epistemic*. Thus we continue to have a problem for the deontological conception of *epistemic* justification. I propose that the deontologist in epistemology should take this consideration on board, and argue that this is a feature of what it is to make appraisals about obligations, i.e. that at the level of obligations (the deontological level) it does not make sense to distinguish between ethical and epistemic (or practical, legal etc.) sorts of obligation, as one can only ever have an obligation *tout court*. So it is not surprising that deontological justification can never be particularly *epistemic*.

In Chapters 7 and 8, I try to defend this last conjecture. I think that it follows if (a) it makes sense to distinguish between deontological and merely evaluative appraisal, and (b) if there can be such things as non-epistemic reasons for belief and epistemic reasons for action (where a reason *on its own* can not determine an obligation) . If both (a) and (b) are correct, because different sorts of reason can operate in determining what one's obligation is at *t*, then it follows that one's emergent obligation is not of a particular sort, i.e. not *purely*, or *particularly* epistemic, or moral, or aesthetic, or legal, or whatever. The claim expressed in (b) however, is not without its opponent. "Evidentialism" claims that there cannot be such things as non-epistemic reasons for belief. I argue

against evidentialism in Chapters 7 and 8, and argue that the way to identify a relevant sort of reason is via appeal to the *standards* of appraisal and not by the *objects* of appraisal. This, as I will show, leaves room for there being non-epistemic reasons for belief and epistemic reasons for action.

Since W.K. Clifford's famous pronouncement that "it is always wrong, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence" (Clifford 1999, p. 551), deontology has been associated with evidentialism<sup>3</sup>. So my hope is to show how one can have an "ethics of belief" without also countenancing the thesis of evidentialism, and indeed that deontology is best defended by denying the merits of such a thesis. In so far as I argue that there is a unity of appraisal at the level of obligations, then my thesis may not only shed light upon what it is we are talking about when we say that epistemic justification is a normative concept, it may also have an important bearing on concerns in ethics. For according to this thesis, not only does the realm of obligation cease to be an exclusively ethical concern, the ethicist must now also consider those epistemic reasons that are relevant in determining an obligation to action, as well as those ethical reasons relevant in determining an obligation to believe.

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<sup>3</sup> See also Feldman 2000.

## ***Chapter 1: Deontology in Ethics and Epistemology***

### *1.1. Sketch of Deontologism in Epistemology*

One would probably be forgiven for assuming that there will be few, if any, salient dissimilarities between taking a deontological approach in epistemology and taking a deontological approach in ethics. In this chapter I will argue, however, that although there are similarities between epistemic and ethical deontologism, the two are different in important ways, important in the repercussions these differences have on the notion of normativity in ethics and epistemology. Deontologism in epistemology is the claim that there are certain *duties*, pertaining to a distinctive *epistemic* domain, to which we are subject qua cognitive agents, enquirers, or rational beings. We seem to have a duty, for instance, not to believe propositions willy-nilly, on the basis of crass, inadequate grounds but to believe, instead, in the light of as much relevant evidence as we are able to muster. Both in epistemology and in ethics an account of what the notion of duty involves can also serve as an account of what *justification* involves simply by defining justified actions or beliefs as those in which the agent has fulfilled their duty, be it epistemic or ethical. That is the central characteristic of deontology, that it defines justification in terms of the concept of duty. The idea that we are subject to epistemic duties is perhaps as old as the notion that we are subject to ethical duties and goes back (at least implicitly) to the times of

Descartes and perhaps even to those of Plato, but here is a more contemporary commentator's view:

We may assume that every person is subject to a purely intellectual requirement - that of trying his best to bring it about that, for every proposition *h* that he considers, he accepts *h* if and only if *h* is true. One might say that this is the person's responsibility or duty *qua* intellectual being. (Chisholm 1977, p. 14)

Three important issues are here raised by Chisholm's passage regarding the similarities and differences between deontology in epistemology and deontology in ethics: firstly, there is a similarity in that epistemic duties (or "intellectual requirements") are borne out of our being intellectual beings - this view seems to chime together well with Kant's view that ethical duties are a necessary concomitant to our rational essence.

Secondly, classical ethical deontology allows that the morality of our actions does not depend upon their outcome - the right action is independent of the consequences of the action. For Kant, for example, there is an imperative, not to do one's duty because of the good that will come about if one does, but to do one's duty out of the love of duty alone (Kant calls this the "Good Will")<sup>4</sup>. Chisholm's passage indicates, however, that we do not fulfil our epistemic duties purely for the duties' sake (or for the love of duty) but, rather, because fulfilling them will increase our chances of acquiring only true beliefs, and pursuing this end is what it is to be an intellectual being. This is because it is *not* our epistemic duty to believe only truths, but it is our duty to do the best we can to bring it

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<sup>4</sup> See Kant 1998.



about that we do (because "ought implies can", perhaps). What constitutes what doing the best we can involves will more comprehensively delineate what our epistemic duties are: believing in accord with adequate evidence, for instance. So epistemic duties are duties for us because of their link (contingent or conceptual) with our goal as enquirers, namely truth. Ethical deontology does not share this *quasi*-teleological feature. As opposed to consequentialist theories, it aims to place whether one has fulfilled ones' duties as the important ethical consideration aside from considerations about maximising utility or furthering an ethical telos such as "the good". Further, at least for Kant, only acts committed out of a sense of duty (for duty's sake or for the love of duty) and not committed simply in accordance with duty can properly be described as ethical. It appears that deontology in epistemology does not make such a demand as one does not fulfil one's epistemic duty for the sake of the call of duty *alone* but because of its furthering our telos qua enquirers.

Thirdly, although the latter point might make it look like deontology in epistemology is the less demanding, this need not be the case. Consider the concept of "duty" and its offshoots "obligation" and "permissibility". Of course obligation is not the same as permissibility: it might be permissible that I drive at 80mph on certain roads, but this does not imply that there is any sense in which I am obligated or required to do so. Perhaps because of the *quasi*-teleological aspect of deontology in epistemology, commentators seek to define epistemic

duty (and so also epistemic justification) in terms of permissibility and not obligation. According to John Pollock, for instance:

When we ask whether a belief is justified, what we want to know is whether it is all right to believe it. Justification is a matter of "epistemic permissibility". (Pollock 1987, p. 61)

When, for the deontologist in epistemology, is a subject *S* justified in believing that *p*? Only when *S* has not contravened any epistemic norm, rule or maxim. Or, more formally:

One is *justified* in being confident that *p* if and only if it is not the case that one ought not to be confident that *p*; one could not be justly reproached for being confident that *p*. (Ginet 1975, p. 28)

For instance, let's say that this is a relevant epistemic norm: All beliefs must be formed on the basis of adequate evidence. Imagine that Mr. X forms the belief that his wife Mrs. X has committed adultery. Mr. X thinks this only because Mrs. X has been attending more dinner parties than usual and when their friend Mrs. Z left her husband for a much younger Mr. Q, she had also been attending more dinner parties than usual. Is Mr. X *justified* in believing that his wife is having an affair? Not according to the deontological conception, Mr. X has violated the norm "all beliefs must be formed on the basis of adequate evidence". Surely, Mrs. X's attendance at more dinner parties does not constitute "adequate evidence" for her committing adultery – her increased attendance could simply mirror an increase in the enjoyment she had at such events. So according to the deontological conception, Mr. X does not in this instance possess epistemic

justification for his belief as he can be reproached (from an epistemic point of view) for having the belief that he does.

Under the deontological conception in epistemology not only can one be reproached for having "illicit" beliefs, but also for *not* having certain beliefs. For instance, take this possible epistemic norm: Do not ignore salient, relevant information. Imagine that Mr. X's attention has been drawn to certain irrefutable facts which lead to the conclusion that Mrs. Y has been unfaithful to him – his private detective has provided him with various video-cassettes of the events, his friends have reported having seen Mrs. X with a Mr. G at various restaurants, etc. However, Mr. X (because he cannot face the idea of divorce perhaps) refuses to believe in his wife's betrayal. Once again, Mr. X is in breach of an epistemic norm – he has ignored salient evidence – and so is reproachable. If he believes that his wife is innocent then perhaps his belief is indeed unjustified; but what is really at issue here is that sometimes (under the deontological perspective) there are things one *should* believe (Mr. X *should* have believed his wife was cheating on him given the evidence available to him) – call these obligations, obligations of *exclusion* (since we have a duty not to fail to do what is epistemically required of us). So the deontological conception can give an account not only of epistemic permissibility but also of epistemic obligation, in that it does not preclude epistemic requirements from constituting relevant epistemic norms. So perhaps in this respect deontology in epistemology is not so different to deontology in ethics. However, under epistemic deontology, does it follow that because S is

justified in believing that  $p$ ,  $S$  is *obligated* to believe that  $p$ ? Call this sort of obligation, an obligation of *inclusion* (since it is more than an obligation *not* to break the rules). So although epistemic deontologism entails that there are obligations of *exclusion*, does it also entail there being obligations of *inclusion*?

William Alston thinks that clearly it does not:

To say that  $S$  is justified in believing that  $p$  at time  $t$  is to say that the relevant rules or principles do not forbid  $S$ 's believing that  $p$  at  $t$ . In believing that  $p$  at  $t$ ,  $S$  is not in contravention of any relevant requirements. Again, it is not to say that  $S$  is required or obligated to believe that  $p$  at  $t$ , though this may also be true. (Alston 1989 (b), p. 116)

For the rest of this chapter I will consider whether Alston is right about this and argue that indeed he is. In doing so I will discuss an argument by Carl Ginet (Ginet 1975) to the same effect. Although I agree with its conclusion, I will raise some problems with his argument and present a different argument for the same conclusion. I will argue as follows: though it might be the case that, for *ethical* deontologism,  $S$ 's being justified in doing  $\phi$  might imply that  $S$  is obligated to  $\phi$ , it is not the case that, for *epistemic* deontologism,  $S$ 's being justified in believing that  $p$  implies believing that  $p$  is obligatory for  $S$ <sup>5</sup>.

However, before doing this I wish to discuss a related issue that concerns whether or not deontology in epistemology implies epistemic internalism – the thesis which claims that  $S$  must in some fashion be “aware” of  $S$ 's justifier if  $S$  is to be justified in believing that  $p$ . Earlier, while discussing Ginet's formulation of

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<sup>5</sup> Though there are some obligations of *exclusion* involved (according to epistemic deontologism), typically to have met the requirements of enquiry.

the deontic conception, the notion of epistemic justification was linked to the notion of epistemic blameworthiness. If one is justified in believing a certain belief just in case one has fulfilled one's epistemic duty regarding it, then it also follows that not doing one's duty (whether it be by breaking a rule or failing to fulfil a duty) will render one blameworthy, worthy of just reproach. This is why the deontological conception links blameworthiness to justification – one is justified just in case one is not blameworthy, having fulfilled one's epistemic duty. Notice that both of the concept of duty's offshoots, permissibility and obligation, give rise to the notion of blameworthiness – as one is blameworthy when one has done something impermissible as well as when one has not done their duty. If blameworthiness is going to play a role in determining whether or not someone is justified in holding a given belief, then it looks as though the notion of justification here is going to have to be internalist in character. This is because one cannot be blameworthy for something over which one has no control (this follows from Kant's famous principle that "ought implies can"). This seems to imply internalism, I'll discuss why in more detail shortly. I will argue that deontologism in epistemology does not imply internalism. In doing so I will consider Alvin Plantinga's argument that deontologism does imply internalism and Anthony Brueckner and Michael Bergmann's replies. I will argue that Brueckner's and Bergmann's replies fail to show that the deontic conception does not imply at least some form of internalism. However, I also argue that the implication is, in fact, incorrect with recourse to the distinction, made by

ethicists, between objective and subjective duty. I will argue (like Russell 2002) that epistemic blameworthiness only applies to one's subjective duty, and therefore that deontologism implies internalism only about our subjective duty. It does not imply that fulfilling our subjective duty is sufficient (nor, indeed, necessary) for justification. Further, I suggest that the same need not be true in the case of deontological ethics.

### 1.2. *Does Deontologism imply Epistemic Internalism?*

Alvin Plantinga (Plantinga 1993) presents an argument for the claim that deontologism implies (epistemic) internalism which uses the distinction between objective and subjective duty<sup>6</sup>. Simply put, your subjective duty is what you *believe* (or recognise) your duty to be and your objective duty what your duty *actually* is. But, as Plantinga notes, it is not enough for me to believe that  $\phi$ -ing is my duty for  $\phi$ -ing to be my subjective duty. I may have made a culpable mistake about what my duty is. So we need to make the sundry assumptions that I am a properly functioning human being and that my belief was formed in a non-blameworthy way, for it to follow that  $\phi$ -ing is my subjective duty from the fact that I believe that  $\phi$ -ing is my duty. If it is my belief that it is my duty to drink the earth dry, but that belief stems from the fact that I am an irrevocable sot, or some cognitive deficiency in me, then drinking the earth dry cannot be considered to be my subjective duty. From this Plantinga crucially infers that if, in some cases my subjective duty coincides with my objective duty, then a mistake about my

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<sup>6</sup> The argument here is ethics/epistemology neutral, i.e. if it is the case that deontologism implies epistemological internalism in epistemology, then it does so in ethics too.

objective duty, is either due to some malfunctioning on my part, or else is a blameworthy mistake. I am not sure whether this inference really does need to be made, but let's have a look at how Plantinga constructs an argument that deontology implies epistemological internalism from it. Firstly, however, we need to see what sort of epistemological internalism Plantinga is talking about.

Alston defines two versions of internalism in epistemology, *access* internalism and *perspectival* internalism. Internalism about epistemic justification involves making one or both of the following claims:

- (i) S is justified in believing that *p* iff S is cognitively aware of what justifies S's belief that *p*. (Perspectival Internalism)

...in order to confer justification something must be within the subject's "perspective" or "viewpoint" on the world, in the sense of being something that the subject knows, believes, or justifiably believes. It must be something that falls within the subject's ken, something of which the subject has taken note. (Alston 1989 (d), p. 186)

- (ii) S is justified in believing that *p* iff S is cognitively aware of what justifies his belief that *p* and such justification is directly accessible to S by means of reflection alone. (Access Internalism)

... in order to confer justification something must be accessible to the subject in some special way, for example, directly accessible or infallibly inaccessible. (Alston 1989 (d), p. 186)<sup>7</sup>

Although Plantinga does not formally define what he means by internalism, he does refer to Chisholm's view that "one can determine by *reflection alone* whether a belief has warrant" (Plantinga 1993, p.6) so I think we can take him to be

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<sup>7</sup> Note that though Access Internalism implies Perspectival Internalism, the reverse is not the case. So Access Internalism is the logically stronger of the two.

referring to Access rather than Perspectival Internalism. Plantinga makes four steps to reach the conclusion that the Deontic conception implies internalism:

STEP 1: For a large, important, and basic class of objective duties, objective and subjective duties coincide; what you objectively ought to do matches that which is such that if you don't do it, you are guilty and blameworthy. (Plantinga 1992, p. 20)

So if a subject does not regulate their belief in the way required by whatever their objective duty is, then they are blameworthy, for it is their subjective duty to regulate their belief according to what their objective duty is.

STEP 2: In a large and important set of cases, a properly functioning human being can simply see (cannot make a nonculpable mistake about) what objective duty requires. (Plantinga 1993, p. 21)

If a subject cannot make non-blameworthy mistakes concerning what their objective duty is, it must be the case that they ought simply to be able to see what such a duty requires of them.

STEP 3: In a large and important set of cases a properly functioning human can simply see (cannot make a nonculpable mistake about) whether a proposition has the property by means of which *she tells* whether a proposition is justified for her. (Plantinga 1993, p. 21) (my italics)

If a subject can simply see what objective duty requires of them, then, *a fortiori* (under the deontological conception), the subject ought to be able to simply see whether or not their belief is *justified*.

STEP 4: In a large, important and basic, class of cases a properly functioning human being can simply see (cannot make a nonculpable mistake about) whether a proposition has the property *that confers* justification upon it for her. (Plantinga 1993, p. 22) (my italics)



Thus, for the deontologist, the property by means of which a subject determines whether a belief is justified for them is *the same* property that *confers* justification for them. So Plantinga concludes: "I have a sort of guaranteed access to whether a belief is justified for me and also to what makes it justified for me" (Plantinga 1993, p. 22), so deontologism, for Plantinga, implies Access Internalism.

This implication has not, however, gone unchallenged. Anthony Brueckner (Brueckner 1996) and Michael Bergmann (Bergmann 2000) have both presented counter-arguments to this implication. I'll begin by considering Brueckner's first. Brueckner denies the claim that *all* deontic theories imply that objective and subjective epistemic duties coincide. The strategy is a fairly simple one: they accept that to adopt deontologism is to marry the concepts of duty and justification, but, the claim is, this does not necessarily involve giving an account of what one's duty is. True, says Brueckner, that traditional deontologists in epistemology, such as Locke, define epistemic duty in internalist terms ("to regulate our beliefs in such a way that we believe a proposition only if we have good reasons for it" (Brueckner 1996, p. 528)) but this does not preclude us from giving a heavily externalist account of what the concept of duty involves. For example, we could specify that a subject has done their epistemic duty just in case their belief is the product of a reliable belief-producing mechanism<sup>8</sup>. Under this definition of what an epistemic duty is (which is compatible with deontologism because on its own deontologism does not specify what one's

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<sup>8</sup> "Externalist" because this does not require a subject's being aware of the reliability..

epistemic duty is) it is not at all obvious that a subject will be able to “just see” whether or not this requirement is satisfied. So there will be lots of cases when it is possible that a properly-functioning (and thus for Plantinga non-culpable) human being cannot “just see” what their objective duty requires of them. This challenges Step 2 of Plantinga’s argument, claiming that his characterisation of deontologism does not “generalize to all deontological conceptions” (Brueckner 1996, p. 535).

The quick response to Brueckner’s counter-argument is to say that there is something defective about a deontological conception that describes epistemic duty in such a way that a widespread divergence between objective and subjective duty is possible, i.e. one that does not allow the subject to “just see” what their objective duty requires of them. But this reply may be regarded as *ad hoc* on its own. However, perhaps there are good reasons for this to be the case. By invoking the principle that “ought implies can”, we may be able to maintain that the very concept of duty guarantees that an alleged duty would just not be a genuine duty unless a properly functioning human being can just see what is required of them by that duty (i.e. cannot make a non-blameworthy mistake about what falls within that duty). Brueckner’s response to this is to claim that the ability to make a non-culpable mistake about what one’s *objective* duty is, is compatible with the “ought implies can” principle.

There are situations, it could be said, when S ought to F (e.g. act in a certain way; or withhold a certain belief), S can F, and yet S nonculpably believes that he ought not F (because he suffers from a nonculpably

generated gap in his information regarding his duty – a gap that he *can* fill). (Brueckner 1996, p. 533)

Nevertheless, one may naturally wonder why the subject in question is considered nonculpable for the generated gap in his information regarding his duty, if it is a gap that he is able to fill. Surely, if he has a belief that he ought not to F and this belief is due to a gap in his information, then we want to say that he *is* blameworthy for maintaining the gap that he is able to fill and from which he generates his belief. Why aren't subjects blameworthy for failing to fill a gap in their information when they are (i) able to do so and (ii) the information is relevant to the belief under consideration, even though he is not responsible for that gap? There may be answers to these questions but Brueckner does not answer them. However, in a footnote, he does refer to (Alston 1989 (d), p. 217) for an argument against using the principle that "ought implies can" as a premise for an argument that connects justification with epistemological internalism.

Consider Carl Ginet's (Ginet 1985, cited in Alston 1989 (d), p. 217) argument for Internalism:

- (1) S ought to withhold belief that *p* if he lacks justification for *p*.
- (2) What S ought to do S can do. [Ought implies can principle].
- (3) Therefore, S can withhold belief wherever S lacks justification.
- (4) S has the capacity only if S can tell, with respect to any proposed belief, whether or not S has justification for it.

(5) S can always tell us this only if justification is always directly recognizable.

(6) Therefore justification is always directly recognizable.

Alston argues that premise (5) is mistaken. For, he asks, what is so special about epistemic justification that makes it the case that I cannot know whether or not I am justified in believing that *p*, by any other means than direct recognizability?

We know many things only because we have reasons for them in the shape of other things we know, and these reasons are not always deductively related to what they support. Thus direct recognition is only one way to acquire knowledge. Why should we suppose that only this way is available for knowing about justification? (Alston 1989 (d), p. 217)

Brueckner, in fact, makes the same point. It might be the case, for example, that the property by which I determine whether or not my friend John is getting married (the property of uttering special vows in a special context) is the same property in virtue of which he is actually married. But from this it does not follow that the property by which I do the determining "is one to which I have a special privileged epistemic access, unlike my access to ordinary empirical states of affairs" (Brueckner 1996, p. 534).

I think that these considerations are devastating to the case that Deontologism implies *access* internalism. In the case of Ginet's argument, this consideration affects premise (5) of the argument (and the conclusion (6)), but that premise is unnecessary to establish *perspectival* internalism. All that is needed to establish perspectival internalism from the "ought implies can" principle is for premise (4) to hold, and I can conceive of no good reason for it

not holding. Similarly, Alston's and Brueckner's consideration only blocks Plantinga's argument from getting to step 4 from step 3 – the property by which *S determines* whether they are justified in believing that *p* need not be the property that *confers* justification upon believing that *p*. That would follow only if direct accessibility *alone* was the only way of determining whether *S* was justified in believing that *p*. Once again, this does not mean that *perspectival* internalism is not implied by deontologism – for *S* is still required to have some sort of cognitive awareness of what their objective duty is as regards belief in *p*, in order for them to be justified in believing that *p*. So for all Alston's and Brueckner's show, deontologism does imply internalism, be it the weaker *perspectival* internalism and not the stronger *access* internalism.

I think a similar point can be made as regards Michael Bergmann's (Bergmann 2000) argument<sup>9</sup>. Bergmann's argument begins by stipulating that internalism is guaranteed by deontologism only if deontologism incorporates a "non-defeater-condition", which, the claim is, cannot be satisfied by externalist theories of justification. Bergmann characterises the non-defeater condition as follows:

The non-defeater condition is satisfied by a belief that *B* just in case the person holding *B* does not believe *B* is defeated. (Bergmann 2000, p. 89)

How for Bergmann does the deontologist characterise a belief being defeated? Just in case a subject takes themselves to be violating (or have violated) their

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<sup>9</sup> See also Bergmann 1997 for a similar argument, I shall focus on its most recent incarnation, i.e. Bergmann 2000.

doxastic, or epistemic, duty. However, Bergmann argues that deontologism cannot imply internalism because:

- (1) All necessary and internal conditions of the deontic conception are entailed by the non-defeater condition.
- (2) That the non-defeater condition is a necessary condition for justification is compatible with externalism.
- (3) Therefore the deontic conception is compatible with externalism and so does not entail internalism.

Why does Bergmann think that the externalist theories of justification are compatible with the demands made by the non-defeater condition? Because, he argues, the non-defeater condition does not demand that the means by which S is justified are determinable by "reflection alone" and, again, that ought implies can cannot do the work to guarantee this:

We can grant that ought implies can without granting that ought implies *can without doing any research other than mere reflection*. The ought implies can principle is entirely consistent with the view that although we can do our duty, doing so often requires much more of us by way of research than mere reflection. (Bergmann 2000, p. 98)

However, these considerations, once again, only show that *access* internalism is not implied by the deontological conception, not that perspectival internalism is not so implied. It seems clear that if the deontological conception makes the demand of the non-defeater condition then it must imply perspectival internalism at least. Externalist theories of justification, such as Alston's

"internalist externalism"<sup>10</sup> are indeed going to come out as being consistent with the demands made by the non-defeater condition, but only because they take on board internalist intuitions in a way that more extreme externalist theories (such as those of Fred Dretske<sup>11</sup>) do not. So the deontological conception does guarantee some internalism: Alston's, Bergmann's and Brueckner's arguments only go through on the strong interpretation of "internalism".

### 1.3. Does Deontologism even imply *Perspectival Internalism*?

I now want to try to show that even the weaker *perspectival internalism* is not implied by deontologism. The main point to note here is, I think, that one is *epistemically* blameworthy only with regard to one's subjective duty and not one's objective duty. Plantinga himself recognises this: "you are guilty or blameworthy if you fail to do your *subjective* duty, but not necessarily for failing to do your *objective* duty" (Plantinga 1993, p. 16). I'll try to demonstrate this following some observations made by Bruce Russell (Russell 2002). Recall the difference I mentioned earlier between epistemological deontology and deontology in ethics<sup>12</sup>. This difference concerns Kant's distinction between acting *in accordance with duty* and *out of a sense of duty*. I mentioned that the *quasi-teleological* character of epistemological deontology made it the case that acting in accordance with one's duty was enough for one to merit epistemic justification in a way that is not the case with traditional ethical deontology. Consider, for

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<sup>10</sup> See Alston 1989 (e), Bergmann cites Goldman 1986 and Nozick 1981 as examples of externalists who concede that the no-defeater condition is required for justification.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Dretske 1981.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. page 5.

instance, this case that Russell takes from Keith Lehrer: Mr. Raco, out of an ill-conceived prejudice, comes to believe that members of a particular racial group are more susceptible to certain diseases than others. Mr. Raco then goes to medical school and learns that this is in fact the case. Suppose that Mr. Raco does then indeed possess the appropriate medical evidence to warrant his belief, but he does not base his belief on the good evidence he has but on his prejudiced beliefs instead. Here, it seems, that Mr. Raco is doing both his objective and subjective duty since he is aware of the evidence. Nevertheless Mr. Raco, we might say, was acting merely in accordance with his duty and not out of a sense of it, given that he does not base his belief on the evidence he has.

This example dovetails with another, again due to Russell. Suppose that someone has enough evidence to believe that he will win some great prize, but rather than believe that we will because of the evidence he has, he bases his belief on spurious wishful thinking. He, like Mr. Raco, is objectively justified in his belief given that he has good evidence to back it up. However, it seems that he is epistemically blameworthy in a way that Mr. Raco is not. What is the difference between the two cases? "The difference is that the person who bases his belief on wishful thinking must think that he does *not* have sufficient evidence to support his belief and so believes *against* reason" (Russell 2002, p.40). Mr. Raco, on the other hand, once he has attended medical school, does not believe that he lacks sufficient evidence and so does not believe against reason. Russell draws the following conclusion from this observation:



This shows that epistemic blameworthiness is not a function of what a person bases his belief on. Rather, it is a function of what the person believes about the merits of the evidence he has or, to allow for negligence, of what he *should* believe about the evidence. (Russell 2002, p. 41)

So one is epistemically blameworthy *only* when one fails to do what one's subjective epistemic duty requires. The point illustrates a potential difference between epistemological and ethical deontology, as traditional moral deontology denies that someone could be blameless by acting merely in accordance with their duty, so, arguably, perhaps for the moral deontologist blameworthiness is as much a function of one's objective duty as one's subjective duty. But, returning to the issue being considered, how does all this impinge on whether deontology implies epistemological internalism?

That fact that one is only blameworthy for failing to do one's subjective epistemic duty is important to the question of whether internalism is implied by deontology because if it is true, then Ginet's suggestion that blameworthiness and epistemic justification go hand in hand is flawed. Recall:

One is *justified* in being confident that *p* if and only if it is not the case that one ought not to be confident that *p*; one could not be justly reproached for being confident that *p*. (Ginet 1975, p. 28)

One could well have done one's objective epistemic duty and be blameworthy and one could well be blameless without having done one's objective epistemic duty. As we saw, that ought implies can only guarantees that deontology implies access internalism. But if only subjective duty is subject to blameworthiness, then it looks like internalism is only guaranteed by

deontology with regard to subjective duty alone. This is because if the concept of blameworthiness is not applicable to objective duties, then that ought implies can cannot serve to establish internalism about one's objective duties. Without the concept of blameworthiness the "ought" in the notion of duty at the objective level is *merely evaluative* since it would no longer contain the notion of it being *obligatory* to abide by one's objective duty. Rather the "ought" would express something more like: it would be a *good thing* (from an epistemic point of view) to abide by one's objective epistemic duty - but by no means is it obligatory. Thus that sense of "ought" does not run afoul of the "ought implies can" principle as there is nothing counter-intuitive in judging someone to have failed to do their objective epistemic duty if we do not hold them (for that reason alone) in any way blameworthy. Further, because deontology only stipulates that in order for epistemic justification to be granted on a subject, that the subject have done their duty *tout court*, there is nothing to prevent a deontologist from stipulating that the only duties relevant to deontological justification are objective duties. Although, of course, one may instead demand that only subjective duties are relevant in the conferring of justification, or, indeed that both subjective and objective duties need to be met for a subject to be justified. But, as I say, there is nothing in the pure rubric of deontology that suggests going in any of those directions. If deontology is a doctrine about the primacy of duty with regard to justification, then internalism (a claim about the nature of duties) must be independent. So there is nothing in deontology that implies internalism.

I think this has two interesting upshots. Firstly, it shows that the deontological conception is consistent with a merely evaluative conception of epistemic normativity. Secondly, it highlights a salient difference between ethical and epistemological deontology. If ethical deontology does not necessarily link up the concept of blameworthiness with our subjective duties, then perhaps it is the case that while epistemic deontologism does not imply internalism, ethical deontologism does.

#### 1.4. "Obligations of Inclusion"

I move now to discuss the first question I raised: under the deontological conception of epistemic justification, does it follow that because *S* is justified in believing that *p*, *S* is obligated to believe that *p*? In other words does deontologism imply the existence of obligations of *inclusion*? Carl Ginet (Ginet 1975) points out that if we think of the distinction between being justified in believing that *p* and being required to believe that *p* in terms of its being false that one ought not to do something means that one ought not to do it, then, perhaps, the gap between the two does not amount to much:

Accepting a gift is (perhaps) such a case: if it is not the case that one ought not to accept a gift one has been offered (there is no reason why one ought not to) then one ought to accept it; exceptions to this are going to be rather special cases. (Ginet 1975, p. 28)

This view seems to make sense: if *S* would be justified in believing that *p* (and realizes this) but continues not to believe that *p*, then we are likely to think that *S* is being unreasonable, unless, of course *S* can provide some special explanation

as to why S does not believe that *p*. So it would seem that in normal cases we should say that if S is justified in believing that *p*, it follows that S *should* believe that *p*. But if we are talking about normal cases then there are going to be exceptions.

Ginet discusses one central exceptional case where “a person may be said to be justified whichever he is, confident or not” (Ginet 1975, p. 29)<sup>13</sup>. In order to formulate the case, Ginet makes use of the distinction between *interested* and *disinterested* justification. S has *disinterested* justification for believing that *p* iff there is a true proposition that entails that S is justified in believing that *p*, but does not entail that S has any wish for it to be that case that *p*. Conversely, S has *interested* justification for believing that *p* iff there is a true proposition that entails S being justified in believing that *p*, and, *also*, entails that S has reason or wish for it to be the case that *p*. Now, according to Ginet, one can have perfectly good *interested* justification for believing that *p*, even though one might lack *disinterested* justification. For instance, Mr. X and Mrs. Y are married in connubial bliss, and have strong reason to trust one another. One day, Mr. W. shows his friend Mr. X some evidence (photos, tape conversations) that very much support the idea that Mrs. Y is having an affair. Having no reason to distrust his friend Mr. W., Mr. X would be justified in believing that his wife was having an affair. However, Mr. X, being intimately acquainted with his wife’s trustworthiness, and being sure (as only he can be sure) that she loves him,

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<sup>13</sup> I take Ginet to mean “belief” by “confidence” here.

decides that there must be some explanation as to his wife's behavior other than her perfidy. So Mr. X justifiably (albeit, interestedly) believes that his wife is not having an affair, and, even though his reasons for his belief resist impartial scrutiny, who can blame him? Thus there may be times where although someone may be justified in believing a proposition, it does not imply that they *should* believe that proposition because they would also be perfectly justified if they did not believe that proposition.

However, according to Ginet, *interested* reasons for belief are not *epistemic* reasons for belief, "justification for being confident that *p* is justification for claiming to know that *p* only if it is disinterested" (Ginet 1975, p. 30). He gives the following reasons for doing so:

When I say of someone that that person *knows* that *p* I imply that that person's position is such that were my hearers in such a position they too would be justified in being confident that *p*, regardless of whether or not they want it to be the case that *p*. In this way the assertion that someone knows that *p* – if the audience can believe the assertion is justified – can transfer the subject's warrant for being confident that *p* to that audience (Ginet 1975, p. 30).

Such transfer of justification from one person to the next does not simply mean that if X were in the same position as S (i.e. had all the relevant desires that S had) they should believe whatever proposition S does; rather, we should be asking whether X would believe the same proposition as S does even if X has different desires than does S. Returning to the previous example, if Mr. W. needed to form a belief about Mrs. Y, his belief would differ from Mr. X's, namely: Mr. W would believe that Mrs. Y was indeed having an affair. Thus, if

we are to follow Ginet, Mr. X has no epistemic justification for believing that Mrs. Y is innocent – he cannot, with confidence, claim to *know* what he purports to believe.

However, I'm not sure that Ginet's distinction between interested and disinterested reasons for belief really helps delineate the epistemic from the non-epistemic. If it is a *true* proposition that entails S's being justified that *p* at *t*, then what difference does it make that that proposition also entails that S wishes it to be the case that *p*? If S is genuinely justified in believing that *p*, then surely that S also wants it to be the case that *p* is irrelevant. What is going to delineate whether we are in the presence of a case of epistemic or non-epistemic reasons for belief is going to be the *sort* of true proposition in question. For it may well be a moral truth (assuming such things exist) that S is *ethically* justified in believing that *p* but is not interested in it being the case that *p*. At the very least Ginet's proposal assumes that one cannot be disinterested in believing a moral truth (some sort of motivational internalism), as well as, of course, that there are such things as non-epistemic reasons for belief.

A better answer, I believe, is to highlight another difference between ethics and epistemology. In ethics it makes sense to talk about an action being merely a permissible action. Beliefs cannot be merely permissible<sup>14</sup>. To do one's

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<sup>14</sup> For this to be a difference between *epistemic* and *ethical* justification, we need to say that epistemic appraisals can only be made about *beliefs* and ethical appraisals about *action* (i.e. that there cannot be such things as epistemic reasons for action and non-epistemic reasons for belief). In Part three, I deny this last claim, so we may just see this as a difference between justification about action and justification about belief.

epistemic duty one *must* either believe that *p*, disbelieve that *p*, or suspend judgment about that *p*. This means that it can never be merely permissible to believe that *p*, because if it is alright to disbelieve that *p*, then what one's epistemic duty really stipulates is that one must suspend judgment about *p*. It can neither be the case that it is permissible to either suspend judgment about *p* or disbelieve *p*, for then one ought to really suspend judgment about *p*. In short, if there is any way in which it is permissible to adopt more than one attitude toward *p* then suspending judgment is in fact what one's epistemic duty prescribes. Moral duty does not share this feature: "assuming that the moral reasons for and against my now getting up and getting a drink of water are equal, it is permissible for me to do either" (Russell, p. 36). So when we are talking about *epistemic* justification, it necessarily follows, after all, that if *S* is justified in believing that *p*, *S* also *ought* to believe that *p*. Further, as noted earlier, epistemic deontology is consistent with the idea that this "ought" is a merely evaluative concept.

The case concerning Mr. X and his possibly perfidious wife is explained away by reference to the difference between subjective and objective epistemic duties that we delineated earlier. If Mr. X's belief really is borne out of *epistemic* reasons for belief, then the correct response is to say that while he may be subjectively justified (or is doing his subjective duty) in believing what he does, and so he is not worthy of just reproach, he is nevertheless objectively unjustified in having the belief that he does (he is not doing his objective duty). The

confusion arises out of an equivocation between the two senses of the word "justified". Of course, a lot will depend on whether epistemic justification requires only the fulfillment of one's subjective duty, or only one's objective duty, or both, or indeed either. Yet it still follows, regardless of what the deontologist in epistemology requires for justification, that being justified in believing that  $p$  means, at once, that one ought to believe that  $p$ .

### 1.5 Concluding Remarks

A deontological conception of justification in epistemology has different implications to such a conception in ethics. The differences highlighted here have been that, whilst epistemic justification implies obligations of inclusion as well as exclusion and does not entail any sort of internalism, moral deontologism, for all I have shown here, implies the opposite. What is the relevance of these differences? I think the failure of epistemic deontologism to imply internalism (and the reason for this failure) is the more important difference. In a couple of well-known articles (Alston 1989 (a), 1989 (b)), William Alston has criticized the deontological conception claiming that it is: (i) committed to *doxastic voluntarism* which, he claims, is untenable; (ii) at odds with the truth-conducive character of epistemic justification. I will discuss (ii) in Part 2, so for now let's see how what has been said so far about the deontological conception affects criticism (i). Deontologism about epistemic justification is a thesis about *responsibility* - i.e. that we can be held responsible, or accountable for what we believe in (believing justifiably is believing responsibly). The notion of responsibility is usually held



to imply the notion of voluntary control because, by the Kantian maxim “ought implies can”, it seems nonsensical to hold somebody responsible for something over which they had no control (no one would blame a quadruple amputee for failing to win the Olympic ski slalom, nor would anyone blame a pre-Galilean sea-farer for believing the earth was flat). Thus, if we are said to be responsible for our *beliefs*, then our beliefs must be under our voluntary control<sup>15</sup>, “this conception of epistemic justification is viable only if beliefs are sufficiently under voluntary control to render such concepts as *requirement*, *permission*, *obligation*, *reproach*, and *blame* applicable to them” (Alston 1989 (b), p. 118). Now, according to Alston doxastic voluntarism is false, “it is clear that for the most part we lack such powers” (Alston 1989 (b), p. 122). This denial is not unfamiliar, doxastic voluntarism has previously been criticized by Bernard Williams (Williams 1973), and earlier still by Hume who said that beliefs “depend not on the will nor can be commanded at pleasure” (Hume 1975, p. 48). Yet, if we deny that we have the ability to make ourselves believe propositions at will, then we cannot be said to be *responsible* for having the beliefs we do for “it makes no sense to speak of S’s being permitted or forbidden to do A if S lacks an effective choice as to whether to do A” (Alston 1989 (b), p. 118). Thus, concludes Alston, the deontological conception of epistemic justification makes no sense. However, the preceding considerations have shown that deontologism about epistemic justification may

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<sup>15</sup> As Alston points out, we may here need to include propositional attitudes that are not beliefs. For instance to “withhold” belief in a proposition does not necessarily entail believing the negation of that proposition – so the deontological conception necessitates voluntary control of not only beliefs, but relevant propositional attitudes as well.

be compatible with a merely evaluative conception of justification (i.e. one that does not consist in making appraisals about obligation). This is because, as I have argued, we are only *blameworthy* vis-à-vis our subjective duty, and there is nothing preventing a deontological conception from stipulating that we are only subject to *objective* duties. If blameworthiness is only the home of appraisals about our obligations, then there is nothing impeding the coherence of a merely evaluative conception of epistemic deontology. The upshot of this is that Alston's criticisms of the deontological conception perhaps miss their target, since they are aimed at the implications of our having such things as epistemic obligations and epistemic deontology is consistent with a merely evaluative view of epistemic justification, the view favored by Alston himself. Still, I think Alston's criticisms are worthy of consideration as criticisms directed at "deontology", when it does purport to say something about our obligations. It is the latter sort of deontology that I am interested in trying to articulate, so I will now evaluate how penetrating Alston's criticisms are against such a conception. I will firstly consider Alston's claim regarding the putative commitment of a deontic conception<sup>16</sup> to doxastic voluntarism, and that since doxastic voluntarism is not true, then the deontic conception is implausible. In the chapter that immediately follows I will explore how (and whether) we can say that doxastic voluntarism is true (i.e. whether, and to what extent, we have

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<sup>16</sup> When I say a "deontological" or "deontic" conception from now on, I mean it in a sense that is not compatible with a merely evaluative conception.

control over our beliefs); Chapter 3 will then assess responses to the charge of commitment.

## Chapter 2: Doxastic Voluntarism

### 2.1 Believe as you Will

Can we believe propositions at will? It seems that palpably we cannot. We do not have the same control over what propositions we believe that we do over what actions we perform. I can make myself act like a fool if I wish to, but I cannot make myself believe that I am in the absence of adequate evidence for it, even if I really desire to or if I have practical reasons for so believing it. For instance, imagine that I offer you 1,000 pounds to believe that I am a giant grasshopper. You may, if you were in dire straits, *behave* as if I was a grasshopper (duck from my imagined hops) but could you make yourself actually believe it just by an act of will? Our intuition, I believe, is strongly to deny this possibility.

As William Alston puts it:

If I were to set out to bring myself into a state of belief that *p*, just by an act of will, I might assert that *p* with an expression of conviction or dwell favourably on the idea that *p*, or imagine a sentence expressing *p* emblazoned in the heavens with an angelic chorus in the background intoning the Kyrie of Mozart's Coronation Mass. All this I can do at will, but none of this amounts to taking a belief that *p*. (Alston 1989 (b), pp. 122-123)

This consideration on its own does not indicate that we have absolutely no control over what propositions we believe. All it indicates is that we cannot bring ourselves to believe propositions *just* by an act of will. For we may *indirectly* be able to control what propositions we believe. For instance, someone who's heard

Pascal's Wager may wish themselves<sup>17</sup> to believe in God, and may in fact achieve this feat by shutting themselves off from any atheist literature, go to church lots, and put themselves in the company of zealous priests. But here they have not achieved their end merely by the means of an act of will; rather, they willed themselves to be put in an epistemic situation where they would believe what they had sought and, again as Alston puts it, we do "have voluntary control over whether to keep looking for evidence or reasons, and voluntary control over where to look and what steps to take" (Alston 1989 (b), p. 130). Yet such control is *indirect*, it requires taking further measures in order to induce the coveted belief(s). In this chapter I am going only to consider whether *direct* doxastic voluntarism is plausible – i.e. whether we have direct control over what propositions we believe<sup>18</sup>.

It is worth saying a bit more about what *direct* Doxastic Voluntarism is. For a subject S to induce himself directly to believe proposition *p* at time *t*, it is necessary that S induces the belief that *p* *immediately* at *t*, i.e. in the absence of mediation ("just like that", as it were). Take, for instance, the case of actions over which we are usually held to have direct control. Imagine that I offer you 1,000 pounds for you to raise your arm. Imagine that you need the money and that you do immediately raise your arm. This is a case of immediate inducement because

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<sup>17</sup> Of course, to what extent we have control over what we desire or intend is also a highly contentious issue, as the "Toxin Puzzle" may show, see Kavka 1983.

<sup>18</sup> For the rest of this Chapter, when I refer to Doxastic Voluntarism, unless stated otherwise, I am referring to Direct Doxastic Voluntarism.

you raised your arm simply by willing it; no mediating steps needed to be taken in order for the feat to be accomplished – you didn't get someone else to raise it for you, you didn't put yourself into a position where you'd suffer unwanted consequences if you didn't raise it, for example. However, as Jonathan Bennett remarks (Bennett 1990 p. 88), there are of course intermediate steps you do take to raise your arm in this scenario– you come to believe that I'm going to give you 1,000 pounds if you raise it and you form the intention to raise it. Yet there is something different about these steps in that they are constitutive parts of what it is to be induced to raise your arm, they are not means you have to take in order to get your arm up. These constitutive steps are simply part of what it is to raise your arm in that situation. Nevertheless, there is perhaps a stronger way in which the raising of your arm is mediated. Your arm would not go up if some neural activity in your brain did not take place before or during the event. Jonathan Bennett calls this *ontological mediation* (Bennett 1990 p. 89): the events of my offering you money and of you raising your arm lie in a causal chain which contains other events in between (like a neuron firing). Bennett contrasts this sort of mediation with *motivational mediation*, which, he argues, is not what occurs when one wills oneself to raise one's arm. Consider the practical syllogism (*ceteris paribus*):

- 1) Someone's offered me 1,000 pounds to raise my arm.
- 2) I desire that I receive 1,000 pounds.
- 3) Therefore, I raise my arm.

Although it is the case (I continue to follow Bennett) that neural events are doing mediating work in the causal sequence of events, it is not the case that there is some motivating thought about such events intervening in the above syllogism (the thought “to get the grand I’ll have to get my c-fibre to fire in order that I may raise hand, so I’m motivated to try to get my c-fibre to fire” does not have to intervene to complete the syllogism). So even though all actions (including belief at will) must always be ontologically mediated<sup>19</sup>, some actions (such as the raising of one’s arm) are not motivationally mediated. For the rest of this paper I will argue that actions that get you to believe something you want to, are always motivationally mediated – i.e. that direct doxastic control is impossible.

However, there are two ways in which doxastic control might be impossible: it could be conceptually or logically impossible, or it could be merely psychologically impossible. Indeed our intuitions regarding whether believing at will is impossible has led philosophers to argue that doxastic voluntarism is more than just psychologically impossible but conceptually incoherent. Bennett, for instance, writes:

There is indeed something so chokingly unswallowable about the idea of someone’s voluntarily coming to believe something that I have to suspect that this is ruled out at a deeper level than the contingent powers of our minds. (Bennett 1990, p. 90)

I will now formulate some of the arguments used to establish the logical impossibility case and argue that they are blocked by appeal to the putative

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<sup>19</sup> See also Naylor 1985.

phenomenon of self-deception. I will then evaluate how appeals to the phenomenon of self-deception could be taken as considerations against the psychological impossibility case. I will argue that considerations about self-deception are not successful in refuting the psychological impossibility of doxastic control.

## *2.2 The Conceptual Impossibility Case*

The most cited argument in favour of the conceptual impossibility case for doxastic voluntarism belongs to Bernard Williams (Williams 1973). The argument goes as follows:

If I could acquire a belief at will, I could acquire it whether it was true or not; moreover I would know that I could acquire it whether it was true or not. If in full consciousness I could will to acquire a "belief" irrespective of its truth, it is unclear that before the event I could seriously think of it as a belief, i.e. as something purporting to represent reality. ... With regard to no belief could I know - or, if all this is to be done in full consciousness, even suspect - that I had acquired it at will. But if I can acquire beliefs at will, I must know that I am able to do this; and could I know that I was capable of this feat, if with regard to every feat of this kind which I had performed I necessarily had to believe that it had not taken place? (Williams 1973 p.148)

To paraphrase the argument in a more schematic form:

- (1) It is an essential feature of beliefs that they aim at truth.
- (2) If I can believe at will then I must, in full consciousness, know that I am able to acquire a belief irrespective of whether or not it is true.
- (3) But I could not consider what I had acquired a belief if I had acquired it in the knowledge that I did so irrespective of its truth.
- (4) Therefore, I cannot believe at will.



Given the nature of belief there is something conceptually incoherent about the idea that I can believe at will, according to Williams, since the exercise of the will runs afoul of the claim that beliefs aim at truth. Jonathan Bennett (Bennett 1994) has convincingly shown that this argument does not go through, however. Bennett makes two separate replies to Williams' argument. Firstly he asks us to consider a community whose members, called the Credamites (remember we are still within the realm of conceptual possibility), are able to make themselves believe at will, although they cannot achieve this with beliefs that would require their other existing beliefs to be radically re-arranged. Importantly, once a Credamite manages to acquire a given belief at will, they forget that this is how they came by it - i.e. they forget that they willed themselves to believe the proposition in question. Now, although this scenario may seem a little far-fetched, there is nothing conceptually incoherent about it. Or, at least, it does not run against any of Williams' demands: it shows that it is conceptually possible (given the nature of belief) to will yourself to believe a proposition at will without knowing that you had acquired *that* particular belief regardless of its truth - for all the Credamite knows they may have acquired *that* belief in the face of hard evidence. Further, the scenario does *not* pertain to show that it is coherent to will to believe without knowing that you are able to acquire *a* (or *some*) beliefs irrespective of their truth - "each Credamite knows that he sometimes wills himself to believe something [irrespective of its truth], even

though it is never true that he *now* has a belief which he *now* remembers having willed himself to acquire" (Bennett 1990, p. 93).

Yet perhaps this reply is a bit of philosophical pedantry on the part of Bennett, which can be responded to by a bit of philosophical pedantry in turn. All we need do is modify premise (2) to read:

(2\*) If I can believe at will then I must, in full consciousness, know that I am able to acquire beliefs irrespective of whether or not they are true *and I must be able to know whether I have done this for each individual belief I acquire in this way.*

This manoeuvre need not be read as being *ad hoc*. Take, analogously, the example of raising one's arm: to willingly raise my arm, I must know that I'm generally capable of raising it at will but I must also be able to know *each time I do so* (or at the very least, *some of the times I do so*) whether I'm exercising that ability. Otherwise how can it make sense for me to know that I have that ability? If I was not able to know this for at least some *instances* of my arm raising, I would also not know that I can in fact raise my arm at will *generally* – for otherwise the times I raised my arm in the past may have just been a product of a nervous twitch over which I had no control, for instance. So, it seems quite fair to say that one cannot generally know that one can G, without having the ability *ever* to know whether one had done G at t. Going back to the Credamite case, when the Credamite wills himself to believe, does he satisfy what is required by premise (2\*)? Surely not if it is built in to the Credamite's belief forming procedure that, upon acquiring the belief, he forgets how he formed it when he formed it by

willing it. So although, as the Credamite example shows, one may satisfy what is required by premise (2) without violating what is required by (3), one cannot satisfy what is required by (2\*) without violating (3). Satisfying (2\*) will mean that I will at least sometimes know how I acquired my beliefs, and if I acquired them irrespective of their truth, I can no longer consider what I had acquired a belief. If (2\*) is a necessary condition for believing at will, then the Credamites cannot believe at will. Therefore, one cannot use the possibility of their existence as a means to demonstrate the conceptual possibility of doxastic voluntarism.

Bennett has a better reply to Williams' argument, however. It starts off with the consideration that mediated (indirect) ways of getting yourself to believe propositions at will are indeed possible. Indirect Doxastic Voluntarism does, indeed, seem possible: we may well get ourselves to believe propositions by getting ourselves into epistemic situations where we are forced to believe what we seek to believe (re-call the case of the person who wishes to believe in God), by hypnotism, by subconscious subliminal means or by contriving to deceive ourselves. I think the latter case has special significance and I'll say why shortly. In the meantime note that Williams himself acknowledges that these mediated means to get yourself to believe are possible:

However, even if it is granted that there is something necessarily bizarre about the idea of believing at will, just like that, it may be said that there is room for the application of decision to belief by more roundabout routes. For we all know that there are causal factors, unconnected with truth, which can produce belief: hypnotism, drugs, all sorts of things could bring it about that I believe that *p*. (Williams 1973, p. 149)

However, as Bennett notes, Williams' argument rules such cases out. This is because Williams' argument does not rule out cases of direct doxastic voluntarism by appeal to the fact that all such cases require some mediation, but by appeal to the fact that believing at will is believing in some way that does not involve acquiring evidence for belief. So if there are cases of indirect doxastic voluntarism which do not involve acquiring evidence for belief, then they too fall foul of Williams' requirements. Williams' argument thus seems to prove too much. As Bennett puts it, if Williams' argument "holds against beliefs acquired voluntarily "just like that" then it holds against beliefs acquired in any way that does not involve gathering evidence" (Bennett 1990, p. 95).

### 2.3 Adler's Counter-Reply

In his book *Belief's Own Ethics* (Adler 2002), Jonathan Adler presents a counter-reply to Bennett's reply which I think is worth considering. Adler's counter-reply goes as follows: "coming to believe or ceasing to believe in clear defiance of one's evidence needs to be accomplished nonconsciously. Indeed this restriction is tacitly made in prominent criticisms of Williams' argument" (Adler 2002 p. 59). But if believing in defiance of one's evidence is accomplished nonconsciously, continues Adler, then we cannot consider such acts of believing products of our will, for they are no longer within our (at least direct) control.

... to the extent that we need to be unaware of or hide from ourselves, or hide from what we are doing, to that extent we weaken the value of control. Though you may still be able to accomplish the same ends - believe the same contents - with these indirect means, your success will be more dependent on resources outside your will. (Adler 2002 p. 64)

Although Adler does not quite put it this way, his counter-reply works against Bennett's contention that Williams' argument proves too much, by denying that indirect ways of believing at will count as instances of voluntarism, i.e. that indirect doxastic voluntarism is impossible if it involves believing in defiance of one's evidence. The wannabe believer in God who puts himself in an epistemic situation in order to get himself to believe what he seeks is not ruled out by this restriction, however, as he has consciously sought evidence in order to achieve his end – that he seeks a particular type of evidence and does not seek counter-evidence for his coveted belief is of no consequence here. This type of indirect doxastic voluntarism – where a believer merely changes his epistemic situation, i.e. what evidence is available to him – is possible, according to Adler, and, further, is not in breach of the requirements Williams set out. However, cases where subjects indirectly get themselves to believe in a manner that does not involve seeking evidence – cases such as self-deception, or hypnotism – Adler does not consider to be genuine cases of voluntarism, since they do not involve the subject being fully conscious of their acts, which he takes to be a condition of being able to believe at will. The point is, then, that it is not problematic that Williams' argument proves such cases out of existence since they are not genuine instances of voluntarism. End of counter-reply.

Whilst some cases of subliminal mediation, for instance cases where one is hypnotised or drugged, fail to be cases where the subject is willing himself to

believe consciously, it is not clear that certain other such cases fail. Take for instance an example of the phenomenon of self-deception (I take this from McLaughlin 1988 pp. 31 -33). Imagine that there is a departmental meeting in a few months' time that I really wish not to attend but I also feel I really ought to attend and I will feel guilty if I don't unless I have an excuse (for instance that I was mistaken as to when the time of the meeting was). I thus contrive, wilfully and in full consciousness, to deceive myself - knowing that I will forget that I did this because of my busy schedule, I write down the wrong time in my diary (say four p.m. when the meeting is really to be held at 11.00 a.m.). When, in the future, I read the diary I come to believe that the meeting is at four and so have successfully deceived myself in full consciousness.

Now it may be argued that I'm not in full control (or I'm not fully conscious) of the mediating mechanisms that enabled the act of self-deception to take place, e.g. the accuracy of my memory. But this point is, really, by the by. For although I may not be in control and be fully conscious of all the means by which I need to achieve an end I may still be in control over whether or not that end gets achieved. For instance, we would want to say that the President of the United States is in control over whether the United States launches a nuclear missile even though he is not at all conscious, nor in control of, the mediating means by which his order culminates in a bomb exploding; were he to give the order we would still hold him responsible for the bomb going off and we would have no problem in saying that it had been an act of his will. This shows that we

can be in considered to be in control of what outcomes transpire in certain cases even when we are not fully conscious of the means by which those outcomes are attained<sup>20</sup>. So mediated acts of believing at will in defiance of one's evidence can, after all, be considered genuine cases of indirect doxastic control. So Bennett's second reply to Williams' argument, that it is too strong in ruling out such cases, stands and the conceptual plausibility of direct doxastic voluntarism remains.

#### *2.4 Two Other Attempts at the Conceptual Impossibility Case*

It might be worth mentioning that a modified way of formulating Williams' argument has been attempted by Dion Scott-Kakures (Scott Kakures 1994). Scott-Kakures argues that believing at will cannot be coherently considered to be intentional action when we consider an intention as something that can guide or direct ("rationalise") action. As he puts it:

I cannot, from my cognitive perspective at  $t$ , see my way through to my altered perspective at  $t + 1$ . If this is so, then the intention that I formulate at  $t$  cannot be one by which I govern or monitor my behaviour through to  $t + 1$ . And this means that, since the arrival at the belief state at  $t + 1$  is ungoverned or unmonitored, my arrival at that belief state cannot count as something I succeeded in willing, as I do when I succeed in directly willing an arm rise. (Scott-Kakures 1994, p. 95)

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<sup>20</sup> There is, however, a salient difference between this example and cases of self deception in that it is not *necessary* that the President is not conscious of the means by which his will is realised in order for the mechanism to work. However, other examples easily fit the bill: take driving a car. There may be something about my personality that makes it the case that if I know about all the mechanisms and contraptions that go into making my engine work, I'll be so distracted by paying attention to those details, that whilst driving I will systematically lose control of the car. So I can *only* exercise my will (say to drive to my aunt's house) if I am not conscious of (at least some of) the means (the inner workings of an engine) by which I get there. In any case, even if it were the case that only cases of self-deception contained this feature, it would not preclude our being able to ascribe control over ends to someone who was not conscious of the intricacies of the means by which to get them, which is all that is needed here.

So, according to Scott-Kakures, there is a “cognitive fissure” between the belief states at  $t$  and at  $t + 1$  because at  $t + 1$   $S$  does not believe that  $S$ ’s belief that  $p$  is not epistemically justified, but at  $t$   $S$  *does* believe that  $S$ ’s belief is not epistemically justified (since believing at will means believing for reasons irrespective of the beliefs truth). One cannot then, without paradox, *intend* to move from  $t$  to  $t + 1$  because:

...the beliefs which generate the intention are incompatible with my believing that  $p$ . Thus the intention must be abandoned before its satisfaction conditions are realized. If the intention that I formulate must be abandoned before I succeed in bringing about the state of affairs it represents, then that intention cannot be one by which I direct and monitor my activity until success. (Scott Kakures 1994, p. 96)

Thus believing at will is an incoherent notion. The conceptual impossibility argument, modified in this way, can now deal with Bennett’s response that it rules out all cases of believing in a way that does not involve acquiring evidence. Under this account, being brain-washed into believing that  $p$ , for instance, is *possible* but it is not an *intentional* action – and it is not a problem to consider *these* ways of acquiring beliefs non-intentional. However, if the argument rules out these sorts of ways of acquiring belief, then it rules out *all* ways of acquiring beliefs in a way that that does not involve gathering evidence – i.e. all indirect cases of doxastic voluntarism. So if there *are* cases of indirect voluntarism, cases such as self-induced self-deception, then Bennett’s objection, once again, holds. Further, as Dana Radcliffe (Radcliffe 1997) points out, the argument suffers from a serious flaw since it does not follow from the fact that believing at will means



believing for reasons other than the truth of a belief, that it must be the case that if a subject believes at will they will believe that believing  $p$  at  $t$  is not epistemically justified. At a higher level, not having the belief that *my belief* that  $p$  is justified is not the same as the ground-level belief that  $p$  is not justified (I may later find out that  $p$  is in fact, justified)<sup>21</sup>. All that believing at will requires is that the way I acquire my belief is irrespective of the truth of the belief, and this requirement is not violated if I merely do not believe that *my belief* that  $p$  is justified. However, there is only a “cognitive fissure” between my belief states at  $t$  and at  $t + 1$ , if I believe that  $p$  is not justified at  $t$  (since I am aiming to believe that  $p$  is justified at  $t + 1$ ). If I need not believe this at  $t$  for me to believe at will, then there need not be a tension between my belief states at  $t$  and at  $t + 1$ , so there is no necessary incoherence in believing at will.

For the sake of thoroughness, I’d also like briefly to mention another attempt at making the conceptual impossibility case, this time made by Bennett. I mention it only briefly as Bennett himself only mentions it to reject it. The argument goes as follows: beliefs are dispositions, dispositions supervene on categorical states; one cannot then create a disposition without altering its subvenient categorical state, so one cannot induce a belief immediately, one must always do something else first, i.e. alter the categorical state upon which the belief supervenes. Direct doxastic control is thus conceptually impossible, in an analogous way “I cannot immediately induce you to make two dissimilar things

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<sup>21</sup> See Alston 1989 (c).

alike. It is absolutely, conceptually impossible for you *just* to make them alike; you have to make them alike *by* - through the mediation of - making an intrinsic change in one or both of them" (Bennett 1990, p. 104). As I said, however, Bennett himself rejects this proposal. It is perfectly acceptable to hold it necessary that going from an inducement to a change of disposition needs to be ontologically mediated. It only follows, however, that it must be *motivationally* mediated, argues Bennett, if that "must" expresses absolute necessity, and it cannot. Motivational immediacy concerns people's thoughts, whereas *absolute* necessity "of a categorical basis for a disposition resides in a conceptual connection which need not constrain the agent's thoughts because he may be unaware of it or outright disbelieve it" (Bennett 1990, p. 106). In other words, the argument only goes through on the assumption that everyone has to realise that there cannot be a disposition without a categorical basis, but such an assumption is, to use Bennett's phrase, "patently false". So although belief at will must always be ontologically mediated it does not follow that it is motivationally mediated, and if it is possible for a belief to be induced without it being motivationally mediated (even if this is biologically impossible), then the conceptual impossibility of direct doxastic control has not been ruled out.

### 2.5 *The Psychological Impossibility Case*

We have so far had to accept that our being able to believe at will "just like that" might be a live conceptual possibility, but of course this does not preclude

it from being an actual psychological impossibility. It appears most plausible that none of us in this actual world are able to accomplish this feat. However, the voluntarist about belief can enlist the phenomenon of self-deception once again in order to disprove the psychological impossibility case. Since if there are cases of genuine self deception, there are also cases of doxastic control, and so doxastic control is possible. Needless to say, the psychological impossibility case is not established by the use of argument, rather it is established by appeal to what intuitions we have on the matter – ask yourself, could you really make yourself believe at will?; and then by appeal to empirical result – can anyone else make themselves do this? So the voluntarist can displace the psychological impossibility case by appealing to intuitions that run in the opposite direction and by pointing to cases where beliefs are voluntarily acquired. So self-deception seems to fit the bill for the voluntarist. Most of us, I would say, has at some point in our lives deliberately ignored a piece of salient evidence or deliberately considered something as evidence when palpably it was not in order to hang on to or acquire a belief we have coveted. Here is a well known example from Sartre:

Take the example of a woman who has consented to go out with a particular man for the first time. She knows very well the intentions which the particular man who is speaking to her cherishes regarding her. She knows that it will be necessary sooner or later for her to make a decision. But she does not want to realize the urgency; she concerns herself only with what is respectful and discreet in the attitude of her companion. She restricts this behaviour to what is in the present; she does not wish to read in the phrases which he addresses to her anything other than their explicit meaning. If he says to her, "I find you so attractive" she disarms this

phrase of its sexual background; she attaches to the conversation and to the behaviour of the speaker, the immediate meanings, which she imagines as objective qualities. The man who is speaking to her appears to her sincere and respectable as the table is round or square, as the wall colouring is blue or grey. The qualities thus attached to the person she is listening to are in this way fixed in permanence like that of things. This is because she does not know what she wants...

But then suppose he takes her hand. This act of her companion risks changing the situation by calling for an immediate decision. To leave the hand there is to consent in herself to flirt, to engage herself. To withdraw is to break the troubled and unstable harmony which gives the hour its charm. The aim is to postpone the moment of decision as long as possible. We know what happens next; the young woman leaves her hand there, but she does not notice that she is leaving it. She does not notice because it happens by chance that she is at this moment all intellect. She draws her companion up to the most lofty regions of sentimental speculation; she speaks of Life, of her life, she shows herself in her essential aspect – a personality, a consciousness. And during this time the divorce from body and soul is accomplished; the hand rests inert between the warm hands of her companion – neither consenting nor resisting – a thing. We shall say that this woman is in bad faith. (Sartre 1998, p 55)

Self-deception does seem to be a fairly rife phenomenon – for the sake of this chapter I've assumed that it is possible – but the question that arises here concerns how we are to interpret what is going on when we deceive ourselves and whether it entails our having direct voluntary control over our beliefs. To appeal to self-deception as a means of disproving the psychological impossibility case, the phenomenon needs to be interpreted in a way that (a) shows how (at least) some instances of self-deception are achieved via no mediatory means and (b) that such acts are conducted deliberately and in full consciousness. The “missed appointment” example of self deception is clearly an example where the deception is achieved (albeit consciously and deliberately) in an indirect way (the memory loss, the diary), so it cannot be considered an example of direct doxastic

control being exercised. But what about Sartre's example? Here the woman ignores the evidence which suggests that her companion wants to engage with her romantically. She does so in order that she may continue to believe that she does not have to make a decision regarding him and does so, it would seem, directly – she does not seem to employ any mechanism to help her achieve her end, except for engaging her mind to other things (but this is just what it means to ignore evidence), so her example satisfies condition (a). Does she ignore the evidence intentionally and consciously (satisfy condition (b)), however? At some level she must, for in order to ignore the evidence she must be able to discern which of her companion's actions count as evidence towards his romantic intent. No doubt she may reply, were she to have her deception pointed out, that she had no idea that she was doing this, that it had been completely subconscious. There would be nothing wrong with our accepting her interpretation, but, on the other hand there is nothing in the story that would prevent us from interpreting what went on as involving her consciously and deliberately contriving to deceive herself. Or is there? It is arguable that S can have the ability to hold the beliefs that  $p$  (this man has romantic intentions toward me) and that  $\text{not-}p$  (this man does not have romantic intentions toward me) concurrently at  $t$ , as long as one of those beliefs is not accessed at  $t$  (or, at least, not *accessible* at  $t$ ). However, to interpret the woman carrying out this act of self-deception directly, intentionally and in full consciousness, is to interpret the woman as believing that  $p$  and that  $\text{not-}p$  concurrently at  $t$ , and that both of the beliefs that  $p$ , and that  $\text{not-}p$ , are

accessible to her at  $t$ . This is not only psychologically impossible but also conceptually impossible since it leads to Moore's paradox: if believing that  $p$  involves taking  $p$  to be true, then I cannot believe that  $p$  if I also believe not- $p$ , as I would no longer be taking  $p$  to be true. So it would seem that no act of self-deception can be accomplished intentionally and in full consciousness without hiding from oneself (making inaccessible) one of the opposing beliefs - but this involves a mediatory step. One cannot satisfy condition (a) without violating condition (b) and vice versa and since it is necessary that conditions (a) and (b) are satisfied for cases of self-deception to be cases for direct doxastic voluntarism, it seems that no act of self-deception can establish the psychological possibility of direct doxastic voluntarism. Self-deception may indeed, then, involve indirect doxastic voluntarism, but it cannot involve direct doxastic voluntarism (since an act of self-deception cannot be both intentional and unmediated).

## *2.5. Concluding Remarks.*

The trouble with the arguments for the conceptual impossibility of doxastic control is that they rely on the impossibility of indirect doxastic control. The possibility of cases of genuine self-deception shows that indirect doxastic voluntarism is in fact possible, so the phenomenon of self-deception causes real problems for the conceptual impossibility case. However, cases of self-deception do not cause trouble for the psychological impossibility case, for no act of self-deception can be both intentional and unmediated. So although doxastic control

does not happen to exist, the reverse could conceivably be the case. The psychological impossibility of doxastic control is enough, however, to cause a deontological conception of epistemic justification problems if such a conception has, indeed, to be committed to the possibility of voluntarism – for if nobody *in this world* can believe at will, then, if we accept that ought implies can, nobody can be ever be considered responsible (and so at appropriate times blameworthy) for their cognitive condition. Accepting that there is no psychological possibility of believing at will, I will consider whether such impossibility really is a problem for the deontological conception in the following chapter.

## ***Chapter 3: Responses to the Voluntarism Problem***

### *3.1 Framing the Responses*

It looks like, although the case for the conceptual impossibility of doxastic control is hard to make, the case for the psychological impossibility is not, and, as I've already mentioned, psychological impossibility is all that is required for a *reductio* of the deontological conception (if such a conception can only make sense if control is *in fact* possible). The quickest way for a defender of the deontic conception is to deny that doxastic control is psychologically impossible, but the involuntarist is going to argue that taking this line would face a barrage of intuitions indicating the contrary, and it does seem that the intuitive support for the involuntarism case is strong. Yet perhaps there is some room for manoeuvre for the voluntarist. Firstly, and this is the line suggested by Mathias Steup (Steup 2000), they could respond that even though it *looks* as if action and belief are unlike when it comes to the voluntarism question, in fact they are not. It might be impossible for you to act without reasons, in the same way that it is impossible for you to believe without evidence, so one could argue that the problem of voluntarism is as much of a problem for action as it is for belief. Further, whether you take a compatibilist line or a libertarian construal (for example) of the concept of voluntary control, then your answer to the question of whether one can believe at will is going to change accordingly. However, the question of how action and belief converge or differ vis-à-vis the question of



voluntary control has not received the attention it deserves. The reason is, of course, that it is a gargantuan undertaking, and one, I am afraid, I do not have the space to enter into here. Nevertheless, there is, phenomenologically at least, an undoubted difference between the control we have over our beliefs and the control we have over our actions, so whatever the result of a study that tried to make sense of the similarities, it would also have to account for that phenomenological difference. This, I think, relieves the involuntarist of the burden of proof. Still, it must be conceded that the matter remains at this moment unresolved.

A further way in which one may deny the psychological impossibility case, taken recently by Carl Ginet (Ginet 2001), historically by William James (James 1956), is to point us in the direction of cases where we seemingly *can* believe at will. It seems we can believe at will, say James and Ginet, when (and only when) it is permissible for us *both* to acquire a given belief and not to acquire it, as Ginet puts it: "it is psychologically possible in the right circumstances, for a subject to come to believe something just by deciding to believe it, where the subject has it open to her to also *not* come to believe it" (Ginet 2001, p. 74). If, in such cases, we can believe as we choose, then we can be held responsible for such beliefs, and so a deontological conception is not incoherent at least with respect to those beliefs. However, although it is not clear whether we have voluntary control in cases where evidence is inconclusive, we

cannot rule out the possibility that we do in fact lack such powers in such cases. We may reply that, although it may appear as if we have voluntary control in such cases, really we do not, perhaps we are compelled to believe what we end up believing by our probability estimates, for example, and if when we are not so compelled, we are compelled, when really the evidence does not favor even in some small way belief or disbelief (and such cases are going to be rare), to withhold judgment (i.e. neither believe that  $p$ , nor disbelieve that  $p$ ). Ginet does not rule out this possibility, but claims that "we have not been offered any good reason to think it is so" (Ginet 2001, p. 75). So, really, all that these considerations show is that the matter is yet to be concluded – we may interpret cases where evidence is inconclusive to allow room for belief at will, or we may not (in a sense this is just such a case!), which side we take is going to depend on how well our intuitions accord with either interpretation and it seems like our intuitions may run in either direction. In any case, a better reply to Ginet and James may be that a deontological conception which is only about those beliefs for which there is no conclusive evidence has been shrunk to size somewhat. Firstly, because we have considerably reduced the number of beliefs for which it makes any sense in applying the deontological conception to, but also because such cases can only occur where the subject has it "open" to believe what they like, "open" in the sense that they would not be blameworthy for believing either way – this renders the deontological conception completely toothless in that it could only apply to beliefs that have *already* been appraised as being blameless

(in that they are open from the evidential point of view), so applying the deontological conception in this manner could only have one outcome: that the belief being judged come out as blameless.

A final consideration we may make, this time concerning the conceptual possibility of doxastic control, which I think is also inconclusive, is suggested in the last two pages of Bennett's paper "Why is Belief Involuntary" (Bennett 1990). Here Bennett suggests that even if it is conceptually possible that we can immediately induce ourselves to believe that *p*, it does not follow that it is conceptually possible that we *voluntarily* believe that *p*. That would follow only if "doing something voluntarily is being immediately caused to do it by one's desire to do it" (Bennett 1990, p. 106) and Bennett thinks this is not necessarily the case as is demonstrated, he suggests, by the intelligibility of the following wish:

I wish that my arm would rise right now without my raising it, going up simply as an immediate consequence of my wanting it to go up. (Bennett 1990, p. 107)

Still, as Bennett himself is aware, this is a suggestion that needs a lot of conceptual work before it is established. Once again, I am afraid I am not going to attempt that undertaking here. So for the rest of this chapter I am going to concede to the voluntarist that believing at will is at least conceptually possible, but concede to the involuntarist that believing at will is at least psychologically impossible. These may turn out to be unwarranted and large concessions, but for the moment I am forced to give them because I estimate that they are probably

true. In any case, I am interested in evaluating the coherence of the deontological conception of epistemic justification, and not the possibility of direct doxastic control, and given that I am going to argue that the deontological conception is coherent despite the falsity of direct doxastic voluntarism, nothing I want to say here turns on these concessions.

So, assuming that doxastic control is psychologically impossible, for the remainder of this chapter I will explore the criticism made by Alston regarding the deontic conception's commitment to doxastic voluntarism. The counter-arguments to Alston's criticism that I will explore are as follows:

- (i) Although *direct* doxastic voluntarism is false, *indirect* doxastic voluntarism is not – and we can base the deontological conception on indirect voluntarism.
- (ii) We need not base the notion of our being responsible for what we believe on our having voluntary control of our beliefs. We can, instead, base such responsibility on our ability (or inability) to display certain epistemic *virtues*.
- (iii) Doxastic involuntarism (of whatever degree) is only a problem for the deontological conception if it is the case that the deontological conception is incompatible with it. This, however, is not the case – the deontological conception and doxastic involuntarism are in fact compatible.

I will now argue that (for different reasons) none of these counter-arguments are unproblematic, and that (i) is the more promising reply.

### 3.2 *The Appeal to Indirect Doxastic Voluntarism.*

*Direct* doxastic voluntarism is the claim that I can make myself believe propositions at will in the same way I can move my hand to grab hold of a pencil. Even if this claim is false, perhaps there is another way in which we are in some sense in control of what we believe. Consider, for example, the case of an atheist who – having heard Pascal’s wager perhaps – for prudential reasons comes to wish they believed in God. That person cannot instantly directly will themselves to believe it (direct doxastic voluntarism is false), but perhaps, through an appropriate course of action, they can put themselves in a position where they would believe it. They might, for instance, start reading the bible (omitting to read any contentious passages), go to church regularly, put themselves in the persistent company of zealous priests, cease to read or listen to any science or philosophy that might cast doubt on God’s existence etc. They may in this manner very well succeed in believing what they had wished to believe. This type of control over our beliefs is *indirect* (or “non-basic”).

If, indeed, we have such *indirect* control over our beliefs so that (as Alston describes the position) we have “voluntary control over whether to keep looking for evidence or reasons, and voluntary control over where to look and what steps to take” (Alston 1989 (b), p. 130) then there is a base on which to ground the deontic conception – a crass belief based on no evidence is blameworthy, the holder of that belief *could* have done better (i.e. he has control over whether he looks for evidence or not). Kihyeon Kim elaborates the point by drawing a distinction between the critical *formation* of beliefs and critical *reflection* on beliefs.

Kim argues, further, "that Alston regards doxastic voluntarism as a view about the *formation* of beliefs" and that if epistemologists with deontological conceptions of epistemic justification are committed to any version of doxastic voluntarism at all "it is one concerning *critical reflections on beliefs*" (Kim 1994, p. 282). So for Kim we can be said to be responsible for what we believe because, though we lack the capability to *form* beliefs at will, we do have the capability to *evaluate* such beliefs and then to put ourselves into a situation (like collecting evidence) where our beliefs are grounded more, or less, propitiously<sup>22</sup>.

Basing a deontological conception of epistemic justification upon this sort of *indirect* doxastic voluntarism is also, according to Alston, highly problematic, however. Suppose that someone believes that the Holocaust did not happen. According to the deontological conception of epistemic justification based on indirect doxastic control, we might wish to say that such a person's belief was not justified because they behaved epistemically irresponsibly in not having collected all the available evidence (having never visited Auschwitz, for instance). This won't do, however. As James Montmarquet points out, "why did, or do, they fail to conduct such checks? The most obvious answer is that they are sufficiently convinced of the truth of these beliefs that they *believe* that further checks are unnecessary" (Montmarquet 1992, p. 335). The denier of the Holocaust does not visit Auschwitz because he honestly believes (for the sake of

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<sup>22</sup> Hilary Kornblith (Kornblith 1983) also bases epistemic responsibility on indirect (as opposed to direct) doxastic control.

argument let's assume some intellectual honesty on his part) that he has evidence enough for the belief that he has, further that he has reason to doubt that the evidence he would encounter at Auschwitz is genuine. Now, perhaps it is the case that it is his higher-level (or "second-order") belief (that he does not need to pursue further checks on his ground-level belief that the Holocaust did not happen) that is epistemically irresponsible – if he checked out *this* belief he would come to believe differently. However, this reply invites a vicious regress: his higher level belief about the need to conduct further checks on his ground level belief will be backed up by an even higher level (3) belief about the adequacy of his level (2) (second-order) belief. To question the adequacy of the level (3) belief would be to have the vicious regress ensue<sup>23</sup>. Thus, even though we may have indirect control over what we believe, it is not to say it makes sense to say that we are responsible for what we believe. For this reason, says Alston, the deontological conception cannot be based upon indirect doxastic voluntarism.

I think that the regress problem is a difficult one to circumvent, and doing so will require making some substantive claims. Before engaging with the counter replies to the regress problem I want to discuss a related problem with the appeal to indirect voluntarism formulated by Charlotte Katzoff (Katzoff 1996, 2000). Her argument is, roughly, that (again under "ought implies can") one can only have epistemic duties such as the duty to *critically reflect* on a belief that *p* if

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<sup>23</sup> See Alston 1989 (a), (b) and (c).

S has the second-order beliefs: (i) that S believes that S holds the belief that  $p$ , and (ii) that S believes that S has strong counter-evidence<sup>24</sup> against  $p$  (if not S would be unable to act otherwise<sup>25</sup>). However, Katzoff claims that neither of these requirements can be met without falling into contradiction: if S believes that they have strong counter-evidence for believing that  $p$ , can it make sense that S believes that they believe that  $p$ ? If we answer "yes", we are in effect saying that S can believe that  $p$  and *not*  $p$  at the same time, i.e. we fall into a contradiction similar to Moore's paradox, and the claim is that doing so violates a principle of doxastic rationality. It all depends on how we view the higher-level belief "that S believes that S has strong counter evidence against that  $p$ ", because that second-order belief only contradicts the second-order belief "that S believes that S believes that  $p$ " if it is equivalent to "S believes that S does not believe that  $p$ " – if they are equivalent then we would have a contradiction: S believes that S does not believe that  $p$ , and S believes that S believes that  $p$  i.e. S believes that  $p$  and that *not*  $p$ . If this is the case, we cannot coherently base a deontic conception of epistemic justification on indirect doxastic voluntarism, since doing so would entail breaking a principle of doxastic rationality. However, the equivalence of "S believes that S has strong counter-evidence against that  $p$ " to "S believes that S does not believe that  $p$ " is only established if there is a necessary link between

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<sup>24</sup> This is probably too strong, all that is required is that one believe that one does not have sufficient evidence to warrant the belief.

<sup>25</sup> Or, at least that is required for Katzoff's argument to go through; however, we may say that "ought implies can" only establishes that S needs to fulfill requirement (ii) if S is going to be *motivated* to reflect on S's belief, though of course he is still *able* to do so despite fulfilling requirement (ii). For the sake of charity, I am going to overlook this difference.



second-order and first-order belief, for the two are equivalent only if this counterfactual follows: S would never believe that  $p$  (first-order belief) if S believed that S had strong-counter-evidence that  $p$  (second-order belief) – so believing that S has strong evidence against that  $p$  amounts to believing that S does not believe that  $p$ . Katzoff's argument relies on a necessary link between higher-order and lower-order belief, unfortunately she does not provide an argument for this entailment, Sydney Shoemaker (Shoemaker 1995), however, does.

Shoemaker's argument goes something like this:

- (1) S believes that  $p$ .
- (2) S is rational.
- (3) In normal circumstances, it is in S's practical interest to act in ways to make others believe that S believes that  $p$  (since "one is more likely to achieve one's aims if one acts on assumptions that are true". (Shoemaker 1995, p. 218)
- (4) The circumstances are normal.
- (5) Therefore, S behaves in ways "characteristic of someone trying to manifest to others that she believes that  $p$ , including saying "I believe that  $p$ ". (Shoemaker 1995, p. 219)

The argument is supposed to establish a connection between first-order and second-order belief, but, as Anthony Brueckner shows (Brueckner 1998), even if we accept premises (1) – (5)<sup>26</sup>, it fails. If S believes that  $p$  and if S desires to make

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<sup>26</sup> This may, already, be regarded as a large concession: as Brueckner puts it, the argument "fails to elucidate any reasons the P-believer might have for getting others to believe *that he has a second-order belief that he believes that  $p$* " (Brueckner 1998, p. 362). Further, some like Steven Stich may well take

others believe that S believes that  $p$ , it does not follow that S has the corresponding higher-level belief (i.e. that S believes that S believes that  $p$ ). Or, it only follows "on some reductionist assumption about the nature of second-order belief, such that as believing that one believes is somehow constituted by the appropriate behavior plus the belief that  $p$  plus the complex desires in question" (Brueckner 1998, p. 363). Such a reductionist thesis, argues Brueckner, is not plausible – imagine a case where someone desires that he portray to others that he believes that his sister is evil. His friends hate his sister and he wants to ingratiate himself with them by showing them that he agrees with their opinion of her; he does as a matter of fact believe, "deep down", that she is evil but he cannot bring himself to admit this to himself, so he does not believe that he believes that she is, "in such a case, S believes that  $p$ , possesses the requisite desires, and yet does not have the second-order belief that he believes that  $p$ " (Brueckner 1998, p. 363). Having a second-order belief is not the same thing as behaving *as if* one believes as a result of having the desire to show people that one has that belief. Thus Shoemaker's argument fails to establish an essential connection between higher-level and lower-level belief. If there is no *necessary* link between higher-level and lower-level belief then the incoherence of S's believing that S has strong counter evidence against that  $p$  and S's believing that S believes that  $p$  has not been established. This is because if there is no necessary

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issue with the idea of it being the case that, in normal circumstances, one is more likely to achieve one's aims if one acts on true beliefs, see Stich 1990.

link between higher-level and lower-level belief, then S's believing that S has strong evidence against *p* is *not* equivalent to S's believing that S does not believe *p*, and so there is no Moore's-paradox-like contradiction and no violation of a principle of doxastic rationality. Thus it is entirely legitimate, for all Katzoff and Shoemaker show, that critically reflecting on one's beliefs be considered an epistemic duty, in a sense where one would be blameworthy for not abiding by it, and therefore that the deontological conception of epistemic justification can coherently be based on indirect doxastic voluntarism.

So what about the regress problem? An effort to block this regress can motivate one to appeal to what has been called "virtue epistemology". I do not think that talk of epistemic virtue can solve this problem, however (and I will show how in sections 3.3 and 3.4), so I will now attempt a reply which does not reply on virtue epistemology. An easy way (and similar to that which is invoked by those who appeal to virtue epistemology) to block the regress is to claim that the second order belief is not required to be justified (from the deontic conception), but, rather, required to be *true*, so that no further (or "third-order") belief is required to justify the second-order belief. Hence no regress ensues. I think there is a good counter-reply to this claim, however: isn't it somewhat *ad hoc* to require that higher-level beliefs be true (as opposed to justified) in order only to block a threat of regress? What difference is there between higher-level and lower-level beliefs that makes higher-level beliefs subject to such strict requirements, where lower-level ones are not? I do not see an adequate answer

to these questions. But perhaps the trouble arises from making *any* sort of requirement on second-order beliefs, and perhaps an available option for a proponent of the deontic conception is to deny that such beliefs are subject to any requirement *at all*. It might be the case that first and second order beliefs can come apart, but they *ought* not to, and perhaps doing what that ought requires is the only proper object of an epistemic requirement. Given what I believe, I believe about my beliefs I am culpable, where there is a divergence between my higher and lower level belief, for not taking the steps necessary to curb that divergence and, by extension, I am culpable for having the lower-level belief that I do. There may be cases of third-order beliefs that are at odds with second-order beliefs, and here we may also say there is an epistemic requirement to make congruous the beliefs at the two levels; there may also be cases where a subject's higher-order belief is not explicit but at odds with a lower-level belief, again we may say that there is a requirement for the subject to take the steps necessary to rid themselves of the tension since they believe "deep down" that there is one. Beliefs are *not* subject to epistemic requirements only when a subject *really* does not have a higher-level belief about it, since in that case no tension would exist between a higher-level and a lower-level belief. This gives us independent motivation for making the claim that the highest-level beliefs are just not subject to epistemic requirements and gives us room for a deontic conception based on indirect doxastic voluntarism that does not generate a regress.

We may object that the room afforded here is too “thin”<sup>27</sup>. “Thin” because it applies to too few beliefs, i.e. only those that are contradicted by a higher-order belief. I suggest, however, that we hold more beliefs that are so contradicted than may be apparent, particularly if we consider that many higher-level beliefs are not explicit to us or are buried “deep down” and that we are epistemically accountable for an incongruence between such beliefs and our lower-level beliefs. We may now ask: is there then an epistemic duty for us to take cognizance of what our higher-level beliefs are? Well there certainly is if there is very high-level belief about the status of some of our second-order beliefs, such as: I believe that I believe that *p*, but I have not come to realize that I believe that *p*. But what about second-order beliefs that we hold but do not realize we hold, and for which we do not have an accompanying higher-level belief? Where does the duty to make them explicit come from, since it cannot come from a divergence in levels of belief? I think it can come out of the “thin” (this time like in Williams’s moral use<sup>28</sup>) epistemic duty to justify one’s beliefs where one is a truth-seeker qua rational being, and the deontic conception of epistemic justification is going to stipulate that one cannot be justified unless one has *critically reflected* upon one’s beliefs. So if a second-order belief remains “hidden” after such critical reflection, then one has not *really* reflected critically on one’s belief and one has not done one’s epistemic duty, the belief is then unjustified

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<sup>27</sup> Not in Bernard Williams’ sense of a “thin moral concept or property”.

<sup>28</sup> “Thick” epistemic duties, such as checking one’s sources or running a control experiment where appropriate, emerge from this thin duty.

(even if based on sound evidence and is true). There is a greater worry the deontic conception based on indirect voluntarism this way round, however. If we remove the need for higher-order beliefs to be subject to any requirements, then it seems that there is a tension between epistemic justification's deontic dimension and its connection with truth. As Alston remarks, we may be justified under this conception but still be "in a poor position to get at truth" (Alston 1989 (b), p. 144): all that the deontological conception demands now is that a subject's lower-order and higher-order beliefs cohere, and since there is no guarantee that our second-order beliefs are not wildly off the mark, our being justified is not going to secure for us a greater chance of our believing truths and avoiding falsehoods. However, although it looks like this complaint is of particular discomfort here, because we have eschewed any requirement for higher-order beliefs, it is directed at *any* deontological conception. So for the rest of this chapter I will evaluate the other candidate responses to the voluntarism problem and tackle Alston's second complaint in Part 2.

### 3.3 *The Appeal to Epistemic Virtues.*

A presently quite popular way of cashing out how we can be held accountable for what we believe is in terms of whether or not we are being *epistemically virtuous*. For my present purposes I shall focus on Montmarquet's

formulation of this<sup>29</sup>, as he explicitly addresses the issues I want to deal with. Citing Aristotle, Montmarquet argues that to be morally virtuous, a subject needs to *do* virtuous things: a saint is not a saint unless he does saintly things; conversely a coward is not a coward unless he does cowardly things. Further, Montmarquet continues, we have control over exercising our virtues and controlling our vices and we should treat epistemic virtue in the same way we treat moral virtue:

Thus one can exhibit intellectual courage, or moral courage, by trying to exhibit such a trait; or by trying to exhibit some more general normative trait (such as trying "to arrive at truth" or "to do what is right"); or simply by trying to carry out some more particular goal such as "standing one's ground" (physically or intellectually). (Montmarquet 1992, p. 336)

The notion of epistemic virtue can serve the deontological conception by making this link: an epistemically virtuous person will believe responsibly and so they will be free from just reproach – the un-virtuous person will be epistemically irresponsible and thus blameworthy. Importantly for Montmarquet, grounding the deontic conception of epistemic justification on epistemic virtue circumvents the regress problem he raised with basing such a conception on indirect doxastic voluntarism. So if the Holocaust denier were to reply to someone who accused them of being intellectually irresponsible: "I believe that I have sufficiently exemplified the epistemic virtue of checking out all the available evidence", they would be begging the question. For, "in a given

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<sup>29</sup> Though there are many, many others that could be cited here, to cite but three see Code 1987, Hookway 1994, and Zagzebski 1996. Not all virtue epistemology is associated with the deontological conception, see Katzoff 2001.

circumstance, a certain level of effort, either intellectual or moral, may rightly be expected of one. The fact that one did not see the need for such effort may itself simply reflect that one was not exercising that effort in the first place" (Montmarquet 1992, pp. 336-337). The vicious regress we saw ensue by basing the deontic conception on indirect doxastic voluntarism is curbed here as no higher-level belief can justify the Holocaust non-believer's belief if they *are* failing to pay regard to salient available evidence (if they are displaying an epistemic vice) because in this case we are asking whether he is epistemically virtuous, that he believes he is so, simply compounds the fact that he is not.

However, although coupling the deontic conception with virtue epistemology blocks this regress, the real issue at stake for the deontic conception is whether it violates the maxim "ought implies can". I do not think that the appeal to epistemic virtue can answer this charge and I will now try to show why.

There very well may be certain "high" virtues to which we justly do not hold each other accountable. For instance, we justly do not reproach someone for not having a photographic memory or for not being quick at arithmetic, and we probably do not do so because the possession of these virtues is outside (at least to some extent) our control<sup>30</sup>. Consequently, if ought implies can, the deontic conception cum virtue epistemology needs to concern itself not with these "high" virtues but with those virtues possession of which is under our control. For instance take the epistemic virtue of believing on the basis of appropriate

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<sup>30</sup> Although we may have different epistemic expectations of people who do possess such qualities.



evidence, we can justly reproach someone for not believing on the basis of such evidence because, for the most part, this is a virtue most people are able to attain – thus the ‘ought implies can’ tenet is not violated.

Now, under the present rubric, we can justly hold people like the denier of the Holocaust epistemically accountable for not believing on the basis of adequate evidence (or believing on inadequate evidence) and we can do so without slipping into a vicious regress. This is because whether or not the denier of the Holocaust is able to appreciate the need to check upon the relevant evidence is a matter of whether or not he possesses this virtue: if he does not he is blameworthy, if he does he is not. However, which virtue is it that he is blameworthy for not possessing? Surely, it is the virtue of being capable of seeing the need to seek further evidence – and this is a *different* virtue to that of merely believing on the basis of appropriate evidence. Further, though it is the case that the Holocaust denier is in control over whether they exhibited the virtue of having conducted the relevant evidential checks upon their belief, it is not obviously the case that they are in control over whether they appreciated the need to exhibit such a virtue. We are thus holding someone blameworthy for not possessing a virtue they are not at liberty to possess – this violates the “ought implies can” maxim. Yet we need to hold them blameworthy if we are to block a regress from ensuing. So the appeal, on the deontologist’s part, to epistemic virtues is either as problematic as the appeal to indirect doxastic voluntarism, or, it becomes inconsistent with the idea that responsibility requires control. If ought

implies can, then the appeal to epistemic virtue does little to further the deontological conception's plausibility. Of course there may well be other suitable motivations for taking a virtue epistemology approach. I will not, however, explore them here.

### *3.4 The Denial that Epistemic Responsibility Requires Control.*

So far I have argued that there is no plausible way of formulating the deontological conception without violating the "ought implies can" maxim; the deontological conception claims that epistemic justification is a notion essentially concerned with whether a subject is behaving in an epistemically responsible way and such responsibility implies that we have control over what we believe. We clearly do not possess direct control over what we believe and the appeal to indirect control, or to our epistemic virtues, is also highly problematic. If what has been said so far is correct, then the only way for the deontological conception to remain tenable is to deny that, in epistemology at least, ought implies can. In other words, one must hold that epistemic responsibility and doxastic involuntarism are in fact consistent – and thus hold that whether or not doxastic voluntarism is true is irrelevant to the tenability of the deontic conception. David Owens (Owens 2000) and Richard Feldman (Feldman 1988, 2000) have argued just such a case, I will now evaluate how plausible it is.

Like Montmarquet, Owens' theory turns on a distinction between epistemic virtue and epistemic vice<sup>31</sup>. The deontological conception can be formulated from this: a subject is justified in believing that *p* just in case that subject is believing responsibly, where believing responsibly entails exhibiting epistemic virtue. Believing responsibly (and thereby exhibiting epistemic virtue) renders the subject free from just reproach, while believing irresponsibly (and thereby exhibiting epistemic vice) renders a subject blameworthy. As such, following Aristotle, Owens claims that we have a duty to cultivate our virtues. For instance, discussing the virtue of temperance, Owens writes:

I can cultivate temperance by persistent self-restraint, attending anger-management classes and so forth. My irascibility won't instantly disappear but, on this view, I am not to blame for that; my responsibility is to *try* to cultivate a cool temper. If I am to blame for anything, it is for omitting to try. (Owens 2000, p. 118)

We could, then, perhaps accuse the Holocaust denier of being epistemically irresponsible for omitting to see that they need to base their belief on more appropriate evidence – but what if they had already tried their best? Owens asks us to consider a similar case in which two people suffer from road rage. In an attempt to deal with their road rage, both people attend anger-management classes and do relaxation exercises in a car simulator with the same level of commitment. However, the therapy works much better for one person than it does for the other. The person for whom the therapy did not work (who we assume has pressing commitments that mean he must continue driving)

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<sup>31</sup> Though Montmarquet, unlike Owens and Feldman, does not deny that ought implies can.

continues to be a danger on the road. According to Owens, we continue to hold this angry driver responsible even though he has done his best to suppress his rage<sup>32</sup>: "Here one's reproaches would be tempered by a knowledge of my efforts at self-improvement, but one should hardly cease to blame me" (Owens 2000, p. 118). From this Owens concludes that "the idea that responsibility requires control must itself be called into question" (Owens 2000, p. 120).

Likewise Richard Feldman (Feldman 1988, 2000) also denies that responsibility always requires control. According to Feldman there are certain roles or positions from which responsibilities derive: "Teachers ought to explain things clearly. Parents ought to take care of their kids. Cyclists ought to move in various ways. Incompetent teachers, incapable parents, and untrained cyclists may be unable to do what they ought to do" (Feldman 2000, p. 248). For Feldman, just because these people are incapable of fulfilling certain responsibilities, because of their position, we should not deny that those responsibilities still exist for them. Further, we should treat our position as believers in a similar fashion:

we form beliefs in response to our experiences in the world. Anyone engaged in this activity ought to do it right...it is plausible to say that the role of a believer is not one that we have any choice about taking on. It is our plight to be believers. We ought to do it right. It doesn't matter that in some cases we are unable to do so. (Feldman 2000, p. 248)

Thus, qua believers, we have epistemic responsibilities that are binding for us even when we are unable to meet them - and so we should deny that ought

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<sup>32</sup> In perhaps the same way we would continue to hold the Holocaust denier responsible for their belief.

always implies can. However, is Feldman really giving us good reason for denying the ought implies can principle? I think Feldman is guilty of making a mis-analogy here. Is our position as believers relevantly similar to the position of teachers, parents and cyclists? In some ways perhaps, but there seems to be one salient difference: it is in one's power not to have chosen to be in any of those positions – if I choose to be a teacher then there are obligations I ought to fulfill, if I can't fulfill them then I ought not to be a teacher. We justly blame teachers who do not fulfill their obligations as teachers because they have control over whether or not they remain in that profession, bad parents because they could have chosen not to have children, bad cyclists because they could have walked. It is not clear that these cases are examples in which responsibility does not require control. Being a believer (especially if doxastic involuntarism is true) is not something we can choose not to be, as Feldman himself points out, thus if there are epistemic obligations on us qua believers that we are unable to fulfill, then there has been a breach of the ought implies principle. However, we are not provided by Feldman with any good reason why we ought to deny this principle: we cannot appeal to our intuitions concerning the obligations of parenthood, pedagogy, or cycling, for example, because it is not clear that the obligations that emerge from these activities are examples of obligations that do not require control. To deny the ought implies can principle all we have here is the existence of epistemic obligations that do not require control, but we cannot

appeal to them because the existence of those obligations is the very thing we are trying to ascertain.

David Owens provides a more lengthy account of why we should give up the principle that ought always implies can which I shall now evaluate. According to Owens the intuition that responsibility requires control can be explained away by making a distinction between epistemic *virtues* and epistemic *talents* and, further, that "we can build a theory of responsibility on this very distinction" (Owens 2000, p. 123). This is how the distinction is made: we can ask whether somebody is estimable in a certain respect. We can ask whether they are, for example, a good dancer, a good drinker, a good skier, a good Nazi, etc. The answer to this question will not tell us how estimable a person is *as such*: it will only tell us how good a person is *in a certain respect*. We might, then, also ask how good a person is *tout court, qua person* – whether they have a particular talent (such as being unspeakably good at skiing) will not answer this question. This, says Owens, "is why we blame people for vice but not for lack of talent. My personal merit is my responsibility in a way that nothing else is" (Owens 2000, p. 122). This explains why sometimes (but not always) we do not feel that we should blame someone if what they have done was outside their control.

Now, for Owens, the same distinction applies to epistemic virtues and talents. Whereas my possession of an epistemic virtue can be used to assess whether I am good *qua person*, epistemic talents cannot. Owens offers the example of gullibility as an epistemic vice. Someone is gullible, for example, if

they believe that in 2028 a comet will collide on the earth, destroying us all, on the basis of what they have read in the *National Enquirer*. That person may not be in control of their gullibility but we would still (according to Owens) rightly hold them blameworthy, and so epistemically irresponsible, for having the belief they do, "my gullibility means that I can't be an esteemed human being" (Owens 2000, p. 124). Conversely (and importantly), intelligence is not, for Owens, an epistemic virtue but an epistemic talent: one is not culpable for being "unable to think up a certain hypothesis, or grasp a complex argument, or recall something someone said yesterday", because "epistemic talent is about identifying and retaining reasons for belief; epistemic virtue is about being suitably responsive to those reasons" (Owens, p. 125). Being epistemically virtuous is to be wise and: "Wisdom is perfectly consistent with intellectual mediocrity" (Owens 2000, p. 125).

To sum up Owens' view, there seems to be a conflict between our intuitions: sometimes we feel that a subject is epistemically blameworthy even though they possessed no control over what they believed; sometimes we feel that a subject should not be held responsible for believing a proposition if they could not help believing it. According to Owens, basing a notion of epistemic responsibility on the virtue/talent distinction accommodates both intuitions - it explains why sometimes (and not always) we feel that someone should not be blamed for something they had no control over. Thus, we should reject the claim that responsibility *always* requires control, for sometimes it does not. The

deontological conception based on this distinction then makes sense. Justified beliefs are beliefs the bearer of which is free from just reproach in believing, where we interpret a subject being "free from just reproach in believing" as exhibiting epistemic virtue (not necessarily talent) and/or not exhibiting epistemic vice, thereby believing in a responsible manner. Unjustified beliefs are those the believer of which is not free from just reproach in believing, where we interpret a subject "not free from just reproach in believing" as exhibiting epistemic vice (though they may exhibit epistemic talent, but certainly not epistemic virtue) and so believing in an irresponsible manner.

Now, although these considerations show, perhaps, how the deontological conception and doxastic involuntarism are not inconsistent they do not give us good *reason* for either adopting a deontological conception or abandoning the ought implies can principle. Within the deontological conception, the denial of the principle that responsibility requires control might make sense, but if we are given no good reason to abandon the principle independently of defending the deontological conception, we have reason to consider the tension problematic. So has Owens given us good *reason* to abandon the principle that ought implies can? Take the case of the gullible reader of the *National Enquirer* who on the basis of what they have read believes that the world will come to an end in 2028. Are they worthy of just reproach, even though they have done all they could to curb their gullibility? According to Owens they are, not because it is a lack of talent they are failing to exhibit but because they are



exhibiting an epistemic *vice*, and exhibiting vice is always worthy of just reproach. Thus, for Owens, ought does not imply can because in this case a subject is blameworthy although they were not in control over what they believed. Further, to call the subject blameworthy in this case is not counter-intuitive because the virtue/talent distinction has taken the place of the principle that responsibility requires control.

However, someone who does not already defend the deontological conception (and who accepts the ought implies can principle) may reply that the gullible person is not blameworthy for the belief they had no control over; if they are blameworthy for anything at all, it is the actions (which they have control over) they might take according to their belief (neglect of their family responsibilities to prepare for the comet's collision, for example). How would Owens persuade someone who does not defend a deontological conception? He could try to do so by pointing out that in this case, the subject had displayed an epistemic vice, so should be held blameworthy. This fact is not going to persuade them to abandon the ought implies can principle, however. For what motivated the story about epistemic responsibility being based on the virtue/talent distinction was the fact that we *should* hold the gullible person responsible – but what makes Owens say this is the now presupposed virtue/talent distinction. So without *already* wanting to hold the gullible person responsible, no reason can be given to abandon the ought implies can principle. To the person who does not defend the deontological conception, Owens' reasons for abandoning the claim

that responsibility requires control are going to seem somewhat question-begging (i.e. not independent of the wish to abandon that ought implies can).

If the deontic conception and the principle that ought implies can are indeed in tension, the question is: how are we going to treat this tension? It seems that the only option available to a proponent of the deontological conception is to reject the principle that ought implies can, and as Feldman and Owens show, there is nothing incoherent about doing so within the framework of a deontological conception. However, because we have to assume the deontological conception in order for us to be comfortable with rejecting the principle that ought implies can, the rejection of the principle is available to the opponent of the deontic conception as a reason for not accepting such a conception. We are thus left with a dilemma, either we eschew our intuition concerning the principle that ought implies can, or we jettison our intuition that the correct way to talk about epistemic justification is in deontological terms. To ascertain the deontic conception's tenability we thus have to weigh up our intuitions, vis-à-vis the ought implies can principle and the idea that the correct way to talk about epistemic justification is in deontological terms, in favor of the deontological conception. Although I make no substantive conclusion on the matter, the latter seems as likely or as unlikely as weighing up our intuitions against the deontological conception.

### *3.5 Conclusion to Chapter 3*

In this chapter I have evaluated some responses to Alston's criticism of the deontological conception of epistemic justification, that it is in some way committed to doxastic voluntarism, and that this makes it violate the principle that ought implies can. There are two options open to a holder of the deontological conception, one can either try to base the conception on *indirect* doxastic voluntarism or deny that the principle responsibility requires control. Both options are not without their problems; if one bases the deontological conception on indirect voluntarism one faces the threat of spinning into a regress; the other option forces us to give up a pretty intuitive principle in order to hold that involuntarism is compatible with our being subject to epistemic duties. I have argued that appeals to epistemic virtue are unsuccessful in reneging the regress problem and have suggested that giving up the principle that ought implies can is too much of a fly in the ointment. I have argued that although Owen's response is partly successful, it is still problematic. Although there are means available to the holder of the deontic conception to explain away the ought implies can principle, they only make sense if the deontic conception is already assumed -this means that if we do not already subscribe to the deontic conception we can rightly consider the rejection of ought implies can as a problem for such a conception of epistemic justification. So it looks as though we have to go for, if we want to hold the deontological conception, basing the conception on indirect voluntarism where we deny that there can be any epistemic requirements on our higher-level beliefs. Whilst this strategy sidesteps

the regress problem, it seems particularly vulnerable to Alston's second complaint that a conception of epistemic justification of this ilk would be very much at odds with epistemic justification's special relationship to truth. The next part of this thesis offers an attempt to understand exactly what that relationship is, and how it might affect our trying to define epistemic justification as a deontological concept.

## **PART TWO:**

### ***The "Truth Connection"***

#### ***Chapter 4: The Problem***

##### ***4.1 Preliminaries***

In this thesis I am trying to work out what exactly it would mean to say that epistemic justification involves appraisals about obligation. In Part 1, I made a distinction between merely evaluative and deontological normative concepts. I also, however, had some reservations as to whether deontological justification could not be consistent with a merely evaluative conception. Deontologism stipulates that to be epistemically justified is to have done one's epistemic duty; but since deontologism does not stipulate what the content of that duty is (i.e. whether it is an objective or subjective duty), and because, as I argued, we are only blameworthy for not meeting our subjective duties, then a deontological conception can be a merely evaluative one. This is because it would be consistent with deontologism to hold that only objective duties are relevant in determining whether one has epistemic justification. This also means that deontologism, on its own, does not imply internalism. When I talk about "deontologism", I do not mean it in the sense above, but rather in the sense in which failing to do one's duty does render one blameworthy, and so identifies an obligation. William Alston criticizes the deontological conception on the grounds that it is committed, because of the tenet that ought implies can, to doxastic voluntarism (which he claims is false). He does so on the grounds that the deontological

conception implies our having epistemic *obligations* or *duties* the failure to comply with, which would result in our being *blameworthy*, and we can only be justly blamed for something we have control over. So Alston's meaning of the term "deontologism" is the same as mine here. Nevertheless, we must add the caveat that Alston's criticism fails to vitiate *all of* deontologism, even if Alston is right about the impossibility of our having epistemic obligations. The proper target of Alston's criticism is then really our having obligations and duties for which we are blameworthy for violating (hence the home of the principle that ought implies can).

In Part 1, I also evaluated Alston's argument concerning doxastic voluntarism and I argued that the only way for the deontological conception to deal with it is to appeal to indirect doxastic voluntarism. However, as we saw, the appeal to indirect forms of voluntarism suffers from a threat of an ensuing vicious regress, since we now need to tell a story about how our higher-order beliefs come to be justified – are *these* beliefs under our control, and if not, are they not subject to epistemic obligations? I argued that two options are open to the deontological conception: either demand that our higher-level beliefs are *true*, or deny that we can make *any* demand on such beliefs. I argued that the latter option is the more viable, or at least less *ad hoc* and more consistent with the theoretical climate the deontic conception. There is a "thin" epistemic duty to *critically reflect* upon all our beliefs (higher-order and lower-order), and do our best to bring our higher-order beliefs into line with our lower-order ones, doing

this will entail our having “thicker” duties to, where appropriate, seek more evidence, check for logical consistency etc. etc. We thus escape spinning into a regress, since we do not make any demand on our highest-order beliefs (when they are *in fact* our highest-order beliefs) except to critically reflect on them, i.e. bring them into consciousness when they conflict with their lower-level objects. Taking this strategy might make us especially vulnerable to the second objection Alston raises against the deontological conception: that fulfilling what can reasonably be expected of one with respect to one’s beliefs can still mean being in a very “poor position to get at truth”. Because the very aim of epistemic justification is to get us in a good position to get at truth, being epistemically justified cannot consist in our fulfilling epistemic obligations without violating the very reason why we bother being in the business of justifying our beliefs. Or as Alston puts it, the deontological conception

...fails to capture what we are looking for in epistemology under the rubric of “justification”, when we are looking for something in the neighbourhood of “being in a favourable position in believing that *p*”, favourable from the standpoint of the aim at believing the true and avoiding the false. (Alston 1989, p. 149)

I will attempt to defend the deontological conception from this attack. Doing so, however, will require us to re-think radically what *epistemic* justification is all about, how so will be discussed in chapters 5 and 6. For now, a fairly recent debate between Mathias Steup and Paul Tidman featured in *Analysis*, I think will help to frame the initial problem.

#### 4.2 Tidman vs. Steup

Mathias Steup has argued that we have an epistemic duty to find out whether or not what we believe is held on good grounds through critical reflection (Steup 1988), he later sums up his view as follows:

- (J) With regard to any proposition  $p$  I consider, I can find out through critical reflection (i.e., through examining my evidence with regard to  $p$ ) whether I am, or I would be, justified in believing  $p$ . (Steup 1996, p. 277)

I agree with Steup that we do have a duty to critically reflect on our beliefs, but I do not think a deontic conception requires that such critical reflection expose whether or not our beliefs are held on good grounds, but only that it expose any incongruity between higher-level and lower-level beliefs: where there is *de facto* incongruity we have a duty to do the best we can to curb it. I will say more about the difference between my view and Steup's in 4.3, but for now consider an objection to Steup's view raised by Paul Tidman (Tidman 1996). Tidman raises some putative counterexamples to (J) above, i.e. examples where "even after critical reflection we may be unable to see the significance of the evidence we possess" (Tidman 1996, p. 271). Tidman presents us with four types of such cases. The first involves instances where two or more people are unequally capable at critical reflection. Here Tidman asks us to consider the example of Watson and Holmes; isn't Holmes *better* than Watson at critical reflection? Holmes can understand the significance of the evidence he possesses, i.e. he can see what beliefs the evidence would warrant, where Watson sometimes cannot. "Many of us resemble Watson more than Holmes" (Tidman 1996, p. 271), so is it



not plausible that even after critical reflection we sometimes have not come any closer to finding out whether or not we would be justified in believing that  $p$ ?

Tidman's second type of case involves episodes where we are unable to remember some piece of evidence that we have acquired. Suppose that that piece of evidence is crucial in determining whether or not a belief that  $p$  is justified. In some sense we "possess" the evidence, but because it is "locked away" in memory, we are unable to find out, through critical reflection, whether we are, or would be, justified in believing that  $p$ . Tidman's third type of case consists of people who possess evidence that they overlook in the process of critical reflection, and his fourth consists of episodes where people misevaluate their evidence upon critical reflection: someone who takes themselves to be remembering something that they take to be a piece of evidence when in fact their memory is faulty, for example. The second, third, and fourth types of cases may be subsumable under the first, since they may be constitutive of what is involved in being poor at critical reflection, but nevertheless they serve as counter-examples to the view that I can find out through critical reflection whether or not my belief is justified.

Now, how vitiating these counterexamples are depends on how internalist an interpretation of (J) we have. If we go for a very internalist reading of (J) which stipulates that we can *always and only* determine whether or not our beliefs are or would be justified by reflection, then the counterexamples obviously contradict (J). However, as Steup formulates (J), we can read it as merely

stipulating that we can *sometimes* find out whether our beliefs are, or would be, justified by critical reflection – so under this reading, Tidman's counter-examples do not vitiate (J), since they do not show that we can *never* find out whether or not our beliefs are, or would be, justified by critical reflection. Steup's reply to Tidman, however, does not reply on a particular interpretation of (J), so, if Steup's reply is successful, then Tidman's counter-examples may not force us to take a stand on how internalist we wish to view (J).

Steup's reply consists in showing how Tidman's examples fail to account for a difference between "an inability to figure out the facts of a case and an inability to assess what one is justified in believing about that case", and that "it would be a mistake to think that the former kind of inability must coincide with the latter kind of inability" (Steup 1996, p. 280). Take the case of Watson and Holmes. It might be true that Holmes is better than Watson at critically reflecting on his beliefs, that does not mean that Watson is *unable* to find out whether his beliefs are justified, "just like somebody who is less good at being honest than others *can* be honest" (Steup 1996, p. 278). Further, it may well be the case that Holmes is a better detective than Watson and this might mean that Holmes will more often be right (have true beliefs) about the crimes he and Watson investigate. However, this does not rule out that, as Steup points out, "the beliefs Watson forms during their investigations, though frequently false, might just as often be justified as Holmes's" (Steup 1996, p. 278). Steup's point is that the ability to form *true* beliefs is not the same as the ability to acquire *justified* beliefs

- Watson could then have as many *justified* beliefs as does Holmes concerning their latent investigations, even though Holmes owns a lot more true beliefs about them.

Imagine that Holmes and Watson are on a case where a new piece of evidence, the significance of which only Holmes's brilliant investigative mind can discern, is revealed. Watson does not see the real significance of this piece of evidence and continues to hold on to his own theory about the case. Is Watson *justified* in continuing to believe his theory? According to Steup he is, providing *he really is* cognitively unable to see the connection. Watson has done all that he could have done with respect to his belief, and, further, it is perfectly plausible to have justified *false* beliefs. Steup applies this strategy to deal with Tidman's other type of alleged counter-example: if we genuinely *cannot* recall a piece of salient information, then we are justified in believing something which pays no credence to it - if we can *really* recall it, then it is in fact discernable on reflection; if we overlook an item of evidence in the process of critical reflection then we either "possess" that piece in a way that is accessible by critical reflection in which case it is not true that no amount of critical reflection can fix the problem, or it is not accessible to us, in which case we are justified in believing propositions not informed by that piece of evidence. When we misevaluate evidence then, that we committed such a misevaluation is either accessible to us by critical reflection, or it is genuinely not accessible (and so we would be justified in believing on the basis of a misevaluation).

It should now be pretty apparent, as Steup himself admits, that his defence is, after all, built on internalist premises. Firstly, the defence requires that only accessible evidence is relevant in ascribing justification, where "accessible evidence" is taken to mean "accessible to me on reflection". Steup, however, does not see this as a weakness since he considers internalism "a venerable epistemological approach with good credentials" (Steup 1996, p. 277). Of course, many philosophers disagree with Steup on this matter, but perhaps it would be a little question-begging to cite externalism as a foil to reject (J). There is a second way in which I think Steup assumes an "internalist" approach, though he does not make this assumption explicit. That is to assume it plausible that "truth" and "justification" can come apart, i.e. that it is coherent for a subject to have a justified false belief that *p*. Perhaps, since only the most extreme externalist would deny this possibility, it is unfair to label this assumption necessarily "internalist". However, Steup's counter-argument relies on the idea that one cannot consider items of evidence outside the "control" of, or accessibility to, relevant in determining a subject's justification in believing that *p*, so although this might not render Steup's account strictly internalist, it does seem to suggest that he has in mind a deontological conception of epistemic justification since talk of "control" invites application of the principle that ought implies can, which in turn invites talk of our having obligations. Now, although I think Steup's response dispatches Tidman's alleged counter-examples to (J), it brings to the fore another more prominent problem (as suggested by Alston). Steup himself

admits that critical reflection can fail “to uncover that what I believe is false” and that “this is a shortcoming all right, but not the kind of shortcoming that turns a case into a counterexample to (J)”. So although Steup is successful in discarding Tidman’s putative counter-examples, we are still faced with a “shortcoming” for the deontological conception, i.e. that fulfilling our epistemic obligations can nonetheless leave us in dire straits when it comes to achieving the aim of believing truths and avoiding falsehoods.

#### 4.3 Critical Reflection

In order to sharpen up the problem I am going to discuss some cases developed by Michael Bishop which claim to show how one can believe *irresponsibly* but *reliably* (i.e. fail to do abide by one’s epistemic duty but by so doing be in a better position to believe the truth). I’ll discuss these in 4.4, before doing so, however, I would briefly like to point out how my strategy vis-à-vis critical reflection differs from Steup’s. As I have already mentioned, the most fruitful strategy to take in order to deal with Alston’s first objection concerning doxastic voluntarism is to appeal to the possibility of indirect forms of control over beliefs. However, as we saw, and as Alston complains, we now have to face the issue of how second-order beliefs are justified in a way that is neither *ad hoc* nor threatens a regress to ensue. Steup’s strategy is to claim that we have an epistemic duty to critically reflect on our beliefs and by doing so, and *only* by doing so (there is the internalist component), can we determine whether we are justified in holding those beliefs. The problem is that we cannot reasonably be

expected to critically reflect on our beliefs *all the time*, so when can it reasonably be expected of one to do so? Steup's strategy invites the answer that it is expected when our higher-order beliefs mandate it, i.e. when S believes that S should reflect on S's belief that *p*. How do we know if that higher-level belief is justified? Steup's answer is that we can do so merely by reflecting on it. That is fine as far as it goes (at least it is not *ad hoc* since it does not posit different requirements for different levels of belief), but it does not answer the question of *when* it is a requirement for us to reflect on those higher-order beliefs, and citing further higher-order beliefs anyway invites a regress.

My strategy aims to overcome this problem by agreeing with Steup that we have a thin epistemic duty to reflect on our beliefs *when there is a prima facie conflict between S's first-order and higher-order beliefs*. This answers the question of when we can reasonably be expected to critically reflect on our beliefs and is neither *ad hoc* nor does it threaten a regress. It also has the added advantage, I think, in being neutral with respect to internalism: critical reflection, and only critical reflection, can expose genuine divergence between higher-order and lower-order belief, but because it is a thin duty, thick duties may emerge from it depending on the situation, such as: "check your evidence once again", "conduct further experiments", "consult reliable authorities" etc. In such cases what determines whether one's belief turns out to be justified may not always be determined by reflection alone. However, this strategy is at least as problematic as Steup's with regard to Alston's second objection; if we make no requirements

on our second-order beliefs other than their being in tune with our lower-order ones, then there is no guarantee that fulfilling our epistemic obligations is going to get us closer to a situation that is in any way more favourable with respect to believing truths and avoiding falsehoods than, had we jettisoned believing in accord with our epistemic obligations.

#### 4.4 Consilience Failures

Externalist theories of epistemic justification have faced the complaint that a subject's belief could be the product of a reliable belief-forming mechanism and yet that subject be systematically in a poor position to get at truth<sup>33</sup>: a properly functioning epistemic agent living in a world puppeteered by an evil genius might find themselves in such a predicament, for example. Micheal Bishop (2000) presents an argument against internalism on this score by way of *tu quoque*, i.e. that one may be epistemically justified in internalist terms in believing that *p*, but yet be systematically in a poor position to believe *p* just in case *p* is true. He calls such a situation a "consilience failure". He aims to add force to his examples of consilience failure by presenting them in real world scenarios as opposed to scenarios that "require powerful evil demons, perfectly reliable clairvoyants, epistemically serendipitous brain lesions, and other creatures quirky and contrived" (Bishop 2000, p. 181).

Bishop starts out by formulating two central ideas that have dominated what contemporary analytic epistemology takes the concept of epistemic

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<sup>33</sup> For example see Foley 1983, 1985.

responsibility to consist of. Before I cite those, I think it is worth pointing out that an epistemically responsible agent is, for Bishop, one that has fulfilled their epistemic obligations, it is not the claim that such an agent is responsible for their beliefs<sup>34</sup>. Analogously, we can take "he's a responsible father" to mean that the father has behaved in the ways that being a father requires, and not to mean that he is responsible for being a father. We thus do not need to adjust Bishop's vocabulary too much to consider his argument with respect to what I have been calling the deontological conception of epistemic justification. The two central ideas, then, he claims are:

- (V) To be epistemically responsible is to display in one's reasoning the virtue (or virtues) epistemic internalists take to be central to warrant or justification, e.g. coherence, having good reasons, fitting the evidence. (Bishop 2000, p. 180)
- (C) In normal (non-skeptical) circumstances and in the long run, being *more* epistemically responsible tends to lead to *more* reliable judgements. The more responsible a reasoning strategy, the more reliable it will tend to be, and the most responsible strategy will typically be the most reliable. (Bishop 2000, p. 182)

Having identified these two central ideas, Bishop's strategy turns to formulating examples where no reasoning strategy is "responsible" according to both (V) and (C). The upshot of considering these examples, he claims, is that for a variety of real-world reasoning problems, either (V) or (C) must be abandoned. Bishop concludes that (V) should be abandoned: "For the sake of consilience, we must smother our inclination to attend to good reasons, to attend to fit with evidence,

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<sup>34</sup> Though, of course, the two claims are intimately related.



to attend to coherence" (Bishop 2000, p. 203). Further, if one abandons (V) the notion of epistemic responsibility is exhausted by (C), "being epistemically responsible would involve nothing other than employing reliable belief-forming procedures" (Bishop 2000, p. 205), and this seems to make externalism the more attractive theory of epistemic justification.

The examples used by Bishop to show that there are cases where no reasoning strategy can satisfy both (V) and (C) centre on university gate-keeping problems, i.e. what is the best strategy for picking out the best students when faced with hundreds of applications and limited places? One may think that the best strategy would be to have a panel of professors with lots of experience in gate-keeping and have them read through the applications and perhaps interview some of the applicants. Not so, argues Bishop, pointing us in the direction of a scientific study by Paul Meehl (Meehl 1954). Meehl makes a distinction between clinical and actuarial prediction, clinical prediction is the sort that might be made by human experts (such as a panel of Professors), actuarial prediction is a mechanical statistical procedure. One can use actuarial predication as a tool for recruiting undergraduates by simply giving certain factors (such a student's GPA) a score and then applying them to an equation. According to Meehl's study, actuarial predication *always* results in more accurate predications than does clinical predication, i.e. by using the actuarial method one can more reliably predict which students are going to do well at university than you can by relying on the predications of experts. The example seems to show

that there can be better ways of achieving (C) than using the methods prescribed by (V). Nevertheless, because using the actuarial method is pretty labour-intensive – it requires “access to lots of data, a good statistician and a computer” (Bishop 2000, p. 185) – using clinical prediction may continue to be the most reasonable strategy to take for those involved in gate-keeping situations. However, claims Bishop, employing the actuarial method need not be that labour intensive since we can use *improper* models to predict student performance. One can do this by “simply adding each students’ high school rank (out of 100) to their test score rank (out of 100) and then predicting that the candidates with the highest totals will be the best students”. Meehl’s empirical results, claims Bishop, suggest that this “irresponsible” strategy will *always* outperform the conventional (in keeping with internalism), labour-intensive strategy involving professors on a panel. These results seem curious, but they are explained by the “Flat Maximum Principle” used in statistics. Without going into statistical technicalities, the Flat Maximum Principle implies that for problems of social predication improper models are about as reliable as proper models and so “since humans do considerably worse than proper models, it follows that improper models will outperform humans too” (Bishop 2000, p. 187).

This scenario shows, according to Bishop, how sometimes being *lazy* is the best strategy to take in order to achieve reliability. Bishop also gives us another example that shows how being *ignorant* can sometimes be the most reliable strategy to take. According to results by Goldstein and Gigerenzer (Goldstein

and Gigerenzer 1999), when U.S. students were asked to answer which of the cities of San Diego or San Antonio had the largest population, they answered correctly only 62 per cent of the time. German students, on the other hand, answered the same question correctly 100 percent of the time and “even if we grant the superiority of German education, it’s hard to believe German students know more about U.S. geography than do U.S. students” (Bishop 2000, p. 194) (further, U.S. students were also better at picking out larger German cities than German students were). Goldstein and Gigerenzer call this the *less is more effect*, for Bishop this effect demonstrates that under certain circumstances less knowledge can yield more reliability, and is yet another case where being *irresponsible* systematically leads to more reliable judgements. Goldstein and Gigerenzer explain the less is more effect by recourse to what they call the *recognition heuristic*, i.e. the students, when they did not recognise one of the cities, assigned higher value (according to the criteria) to the city they did recognize – so German students correctly picked out San Diego as the city with the higher population because they did not recognise ‘San Antonio’. The less is more effect works when the recognition validity is greater than the knowledge validity. So infers Bishop, there are times when “too much learnin’ *can* be a bad thing”.

Bishop’s strategy is to use these results to nudge us in the direction of defining epistemic responsibility in externalist terms, since being responsible in an internalist sense can result in our having *irresponsible* but reliable belief-



forming strategies (and *responsible* but unreliable belief-forming strategies), i.e. it can result in our having systematic consilience failure. So, he concludes, "for the sake of consilience, we must smother our need to attend to good reasons, to attend to fit with evidence, to attend to coherence" (Bishop 2000, p. 203). Now, although I accept that these examples, interesting as they are, show that we can have epistemically lucky belief forming *strategies*, I do not think that they tell against the internalist view of responsibility. All they show is that the externalist is not the only view of epistemic justification that has to deal with the phenomenon of epistemic luck. In that sense they level out the burden of proof: a *tu quoque* argument never *refutes* its opponent. Precisely because these strategies are *lucky*, we cannot say that (V) and (C) are always *systematically* at odds with each other - although we can say that *sometimes* they are systematically at odds with each other - so it may continue to be the case that in the *long run*, being more epistemically responsible (in the *internalist* sense) is going to yield more reliable judgements even though there are times where it will *systematically* fail to do so. That responsible believing in an internalist sense can at times *systematically* fail to guarantee reliability, does not refute the contention that the most responsible strategy tends to be the most reliable: even if there are times when an irresponsible strategy is the more reliable strategy, employing the irresponsible strategy *in the long run* (i.e. on most other situations) will be less reliable than employing the responsible strategy. At the very least, Bishop's argument trades on an ambiguity in the phrase "in the long run" since there is a

difference between demanding that continued employment of a responsible strategy to solve a particular problem will *in the long run* be more reliable, and demanding that employing responsible strategies will *in most situations* (i.e. "in the long run") be the most reliable belief forming strategy. There is nothing in (C) or (V) that blocks the internalist from demanding only the latter.

Further, even if we accept that Bishop's argument succeeds in showing how (V) and (C) are systematically at odds, it is hard to see how an "externalist" replacement is going to be a view about epistemic *responsibility*. In order to block Bishop's examples as counting as counter-examples to a view about what epistemic responsibility is, we would have to define an epistemically responsible strategy as that which is always the more reliable. But making this move raises the question of what work the notion of responsibility now does: if a responsible belief forming strategy is *always* the more reliable one why bother demanding that the strategy be responsible and not merely reliable? And if we accept that an internalist account views reliability as its goal (i.e. takes (C) on board) then why is this view *externalist* except for its denial that responsible believing is of any importance? Surely, then, if Bishop's argument against an internalist conception of responsibility goes through then it goes through against *any* conception of epistemic *responsibility*<sup>35</sup> - internalist or externalist. If the notion of epistemic responsibility is a deontological and not merely evaluative notion, then this once

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<sup>35</sup> That is not to say, however, that internalism and "responsibilism" are necessarily linked.

again shows that the correct target of this type of consideration is deontological conception construed as involving appraisals of obligation, and not internalism.

#### *4.5 Alston's Version of the Problem*

I now want to move on to discuss Alston's version of the "consilience problem". I'll argue that although Alston's formulation of the problem is more persuasive than Bishop's, it shares the feature that it is properly an argument against the deontological conception as I have construed it, not its ostensive targets: all of deontologism (i.e. including deontologism that is consistent with a merely evaluative conception) and internalism. Alston (Alston 1989 (a) and (b)) offers us two types of example where "one may be deontologically justified in a belief without forming the belief in a truth-conducive way" (Alston 1989 (b), p. 145), the first are cases of "cultural isolation" and the second cases of "cognitive deficiency". Let's look at the cultural isolation case first.

Alston asks us to consider a subject S who has, all their lives, lived in an isolated primitive community. The community has certain entrenched traditions that nobody living in that community questions. The content of those traditions is embedded in events in distant time and space about which S (and the other members of S's tribe) has no possible way of obtaining any independent evidence. These traditions form a very important role in the communal life of the tribe and S has never encountered anyone who has questioned those traditions and the implied folklore of the tribe. We could add to Alston's example that there is no way that S can escape from the tribe – the inhabitants of Easter Island were

in such a predicament during the period when the west had not discovered the island, and when its inhabitants had cut down all the trees on the island thereby making it impossible to make a raft necessary for escape. Hence evidence against the folklore of their tradition is inaccessible. According to Alston, the beliefs that S forms on the basis are in no way culpable, since S has failed to do anything S could reasonably expected to do, S's beliefs "about, for example, the origins of the tribe stem from what, as far as he can see, are the best grounds one could have for such beliefs" (Alston 1989 (b), p. 145). However, suppose, asks Alston, that the traditions have not been formed in a way that makes them a reliable indication of their truth: S would then be deontologically justified, but not believing in a way conducive to truth.

The second case Alston considers, a case of "cognitive deficiency", involves a university student who "doesn't have what it takes to follow abstract philosophical exposition or reasoning" (Alston 1989 (b), p. 146). The student comes to read book four of Locke's *Essay*, and upon reading it the student comes to think that Locke's view is that everything is a matter of opinion. The student is just "cognitively" incapable of seeing the difference between the latter and the view that one's knowledge is restricted to one's own ideas, and, further, there is nothing that he could do that would lead the student to appreciate the difference. No amount of re-reading the text or consulting with their lecturers will help them appreciate the difference. So, argues Alston, we cannot hold that student *culpable* for having the belief about Locke that they do, so we must consider them

justified from a deontological point of view, even though the belief is terribly ill-grounded "based as it is on the student's dim-witted impressions of Locke" (Alston 1989 (b), p. 147). So once again, we have an example that demonstrates that there can be a gulf between deontological justification and the truth-conducive character of epistemic justification.

Mathias Steup (Steup 1988) objects that subject S, or the student above, cannot really be said to be justified under the deontological conception. As I indicated in 4.2, for Steup, we have a duty as rational agents to critically reflect on our beliefs and upon critical reflection we can find out whether our beliefs are based on good grounds or not:

No matter how grim the circumstances are, if an agent holds a belief contrary to evidence, it is within his power, given that he is a *rational* agent, to *reflect* upon his belief and thereby to find out that he had better withhold it, or even assent to its negation. Being a rational agent, I would say, involves the capacity to find out, with respect to any belief, whether or not it is being held on good grounds. (Steup 1988, p. 78)

So if S's beliefs are not based on good grounds, it means that S has not critically reflected on their beliefs and thereby has not done their epistemic duty and so cannot be said to be justified from a deontological point of view. Likewise, the student of Locke is capable and has a duty to ask themselves "Do I understand Locke's *Essay* well enough to be justified in assenting to this interpretation?" (Steup 1988, p. 80). Had they asked themselves the question, they would have, according to Steup, realised that they had not got good grounds for having the belief they did about Locke and so we cannot grant the lousy student of Locke



deontological justification; they could be reasonably expected to do more, they did not meet their epistemic requirements.

With regard to the cultural isolation case, Alston replies that Steup is "displaying an insensitivity to cultural differences" (Alston 1989 (b), p. 146). According to Alston, Steup presupposes that judgements about adequacy of grounds are going to be uniform across cultures. Alston denies this presupposition, claiming that "what can reasonably expected of a subject with respect to, for instance, critical examination of beliefs and their bases will differ across cultures" (Alston 1989 (b), p. 146). This is not to advocate some sort of cultural relativism, however, since it does not entail the claim that what is in fact adequate evidence varies from culture to culture. The claim is rather, that deontological justification *has* to take on board cultural differences because it depends, because ought implies can, on what can reasonably be expected of a subject, and this will sometimes be influenced by what one's cultural inheritance is, "but truth conductivity does not so depend. Hence they can diverge" (Alston 1989 (b), p. 146).

Vis-à-vis the cognitive deficiency case, Alston replies that, although the student is indeed capable of asking themselves whether or not they understand Locke's essay well enough, asking themselves that question is not going to lead them to withhold assent. The student does ask themselves that question (answers it in the affirmative) and continues, with confidence, to believe that their interpretation of Locke is the right one. Why should they deny it, since it is based

upon multiple readings of Locke's seminal text? Now, I think the problem here consists in putting the debate in the terms of a debate between deontology (and for Alston, thereby internalism) and externalism. Of course, if one is an internalist, then one is going to agree with Steup that the student's critically reflecting on their interpretation is going to be enough for him to determine whether or not he is in fact holding the interpretation on good grounds; the externalist is clearly going to deny this, so here we are in danger of this turning into a fruitless debate.

As I see it, the proper target of Alston's cases is the deontological conception of epistemic justification, independent of any claims with regard to internalism or externalism. Everyone agrees that the student of Locke can ask himself whether or not their interpretation of Locke is held on good grounds, whether or not such asking will be enough to tell them whether or not having such an interpretation is in fact held on good grounds is what is at issue in the debate between internalists and externalists. But that is not really the nub of the issue, what matters is *when* can we be expected to ask ourselves questions such as these (given that we cannot reasonably be expected to critically reflect upon our beliefs all the time)? As we saw earlier, there is something wrong with the answer: when our higher-level beliefs mandate it – for perhaps the Locke student's higher level-beliefs do not mandate asking himself any questions. To keep them from being justified from on deontological conception, we would then have to say that they have failed to do their duty with regard to their higher-level

beliefs, but then it is easy to see how a regress can ensue. (Note: this point goes through, or fails to, independently of the issue doxastic voluntarism of whatever version). My solution to this problem, as outlined in 4.3, is to assign blame only when one's higher and lower order beliefs are in conflict. However, we still face the scenario where the Locke student's higher-order beliefs sanction their lower-order interpretation, so we still face a scenario where someone may be justified from a deontological point of view (being free from just reproach) but still be in a poor position with regard to truth.

#### *4.6 Summary of Chapter 4*

The scenarios dreamt up by Bishop and Alston do, then, pose a problem. We must be clear, however, what they pose a problem for. In this chapter I have suggested that the proper target of these concerns is, as I have outlined it, the deontological conception of epistemic justification. They do not have any *real* bearing on the internalism vs. externalism debate. Nor do they have any bearing on a deontological conception formulated in such a way as to be consistent with a merely evaluative one, in a way that will allow S to have failed to contravene any epistemic norm relevant to believing that *p*, so be entitled to believe that *p*, and thereby be in a very good position to get at truth because the norms relevant prescribe precisely, because they are externalist in character, that S is in a good position to believe *p* if true and disbelieve *p* if false. I think, then, that the deontological conception (not construed in the latter fashion) must bite the bullet in the wake of Bishop's and Aston's cases and concede that under this conception

of epistemic justification, truth and justification can come apart. In the chapters that follow, however, I will seek to demonstrate why this concession is not really so problematic, but doing so will force us to rethink some of the ways in which epistemologists have been discussing epistemic normativity.

### 5.1 Introduction

In the light of the “truth problem” – as outlined in Chapter 4 – Alston recommends abandoning a normative conception of epistemic justification altogether and to opt, instead, for a merely evaluative one where “one can evaluate S’s believing that *p* as good, favourable, desirable without thinking of it as fulfilling or not violating an obligation” (Alston 1989 (a), p. 97). In this chapter and the next I shall attempt to formulate a solution to the problem that will hopefully serve as a coherent alternative to Alston’s recommendation. In order to formulate my response, I will first consider some further responses to (Feldman 1988) and critiques of the problem as formulated by Alston (Vahid 1998). I will also consider a related problem, termed “the responsibilism dilemma” by Stephen Hetherington (Hetherington 2002) and a reply to it from Gordon Barnes (Barnes 2002). In this chapter I will suggest that the replies from Barnes and Vahid, whilst not entirely successful, indicate a promising line of defence of the deontological conception. In the following chapter I will attempt to develop this line with particular reference to Alston’s recent “desiderata view” of epistemic appraisal (Alston 1993, 2005), and try to show that the defence’s seemingly radical implications are not so counter-intuitive.

### 5.2 Feldman on Objective and Subjective Justification

Richard Feldman (Feldman 1988) argues that epistemic (unlike ethical) objective justification is equivalent to what he calls *moderate* subjective

justification, he calls this the *Equivalence Thesis*. Here are the three relevant ways in which he claims someone may be justified in holding a belief:

*Objective Justification:* S is *objectively* justified in believing that *p* just in case S has good reasons to believe that *p*.

*Subjective Justification:* S is *subjectively* justified in believing that *p* just in case S believes he has good reasons for believing that *p*.

*Moderate Subjective Justification:* S is *moderately subjectively* justified in believing that *p* just in case he is objectively justified in believing that he has good reasons for believing that *p*.

Making the analogy with action, he says:

There can be actions that are subjectively justified, but not objectively justified. For similar reasons, actions can be objectively justified without being subjectively justified... I will argue that objective and moderate subjective epistemic justification are not similarly related. (Feldman 1988, p. 415)

Feldman regards cases like Alston's cultural isolation case as trying to show how (moderate) subjective justification and objective justification can systematically come apart. Feldman asks us to consider his own case of apparent "consilience failure"<sup>36</sup>: Imagine that a student is taught to make the Gambler's Fallacy (G) by their otherwise very reliable logic teacher. To believe (G) is to believe that if a certain number on a die does not come up after a series of tosses, then the chances are that it is going to come up on the next toss. The student rolls a die and comes to realise, after a series of tosses, that a particular number has failed to

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<sup>36</sup> Although Feldman does not use this term.

show up (evidence E). On the basis of E and given their justified belief in G, the student forms the belief that there is a high likelihood of that number coming up in their next toss (W). So, here there seems to be a case where S is (moderately) subjectively justified in believing that *p*, but in a poor position to believe the truth, or not objectively justified, since the belief is based on inadequate grounds. Feldman, however, disputes this is a genuine case of consilience failure, because it is the student's total evidence (E\*), and not just E, that should be assessed for adequacy. Since E\* also includes the testimonial evidence that the student has for G, then, unlike E, E\* is really a good grounds to believe W – so the belief is, after all, objectively justified. Feldman claims that this strategy can be used to show how every moderately subjectively justified belief is always also an objectively justified one.

However, as Vahid (Vahid 1998) has pointed out, it is rather difficult to see how this strategy can lend credibility to the Equivalency Thesis. Firstly, consider the thesis of the underdetermination of theory by evidence the claim that, contrary to Hempel, confirmation is a “three-place relationship between hypothesis, observations, and background assumptions” (Vahid 1998, p. 294). If this last thought is right then E can be said to support W only in the context of some background theory, so whether or not E counts as adequate evidence for W is determined by whether or not the background theory (i.e. G) is itself adequately supported, “that is why we are inclined to say, with Feldman, that E is not a good reason for W” (Vahid 1998, p. 294). This is because were G itself to

be adequately supported then we *would* consider E as good reason for W, and the point is that replacing E with E\* does not alter the evidential support for G, so E\* is *also* not adequate grounds for W. Further, I continue to follow Vahid here, the situation is not remedied by appeal to the student's other beliefs and that W is deduced from them since "surely she is objectively justified in believing what she knows to follow by *modus ponens* from other things she is objectively justified in believing" (Feldman 1988, p. 416). There is no remedy here, argues Vahid, because for the argument to go through it would have to take this form:

- (1) S is objectively justified in believing E
- (2) If S is objectively justified in believing E, then S is objectively justified in believing W

So by, *modus ponens*,

- (3) S is objectively justified in believing W.

Yet, as Vahid points out, premise (2) is not available to us. All we are entitled to is the premise that we are objectively justified in *believing* that if E then W, and that is not the same premise as (2). From *this* premise and premise (1), no application of *modus ponens* can get us to (3) without use of the Principle of Closure (i.e. that if one is justified in believing that *p*, and *p* implies *q*, then one is also justified in believing that *q*). Vahid concludes that the principle of closure is so controversial<sup>37</sup> as to discredit Feldman's argument. Perhaps Vahid's conclusion is too strong (since it is not clear that the Principle of Closure is *that*

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<sup>37</sup> See for example Dretske 1970, Nozick 1981, Breuckner 1985, Feldman 1995.



contentious), but his considerations do, nevertheless, seem to volley the burden of proof back onto Feldman's court. They also seem to indicate the difficulty and potential fruitlessness of pursuing Feldman's Equivalence Thesis as an avenue of defence against Alston's problem. It is, of course, even more fruitless if I am right in considering the deontological conception consistent with either objective, subjective, or moderately subjective accounts of epistemic justification (so its tenability will be assured or not independently of whether subjective and objective justification diverge). So I will, instead, for the moment, pursue Vahid's own line of defence which I will outline in the following section.

### *5.3 Vahid on Alston*

Vahid (Vahid 1998) presents us with two different lines of defence for the deontological conception. The first is ingenious and well-worked out, but unfortunately, I don't think, ultimately works. The second is cursory and not much more than suggested, but I think is the more fruitful line to take. The first strategy involves looking at how Alston himself tries to formulate a deontological conception in a non-partisan way. A deontological conception has it that to be justified in believing that *p* one has not flouted or contravened any epistemic norm. As I have already mentioned and Vahid notes, the content of these norms could be "construed in a number of different ways, requiring the formation of beliefs that, say, cohere with the rest of one's belief system, that are produced by reliable cognitive processes and so on" (Vahid 1998, p. 287) and so is consistent with both externalist and internalist theories. Alston's alternative to

a deontological conception he calls evaluative, that alternative we can formulate as follows:

- (Je) S is Je in believing that *p* just in case S has adequate grounds for his belief "where the adequacy is measured by whether the grounds are sufficiently indicative of the truth of *p*". (Vahid 1998, p. 288)

For Alston to evaluate someone as being justified in believing that *p*, is just to say the they have done a "good thing" from an epistemic point of view, it is not to hold them in any way accountable, since "one can evaluate S's believing that *p* as good, favourable, desirable without thinking of it as fulfilling or not violating an obligation" (Alston 1989 (a), p. 97) and, of course, does not radically diverge from our proper epistemic aim to believe true propositions and avoid believing false ones. How does Alston characterise the deontological conception in a non-partisan way? According to Vahid, Alston discerns three<sup>38</sup> modes in which it could be cashed out, they are:

- (X) S is objectively justified in believing that *p* iff S has adequate evidence for *p*.
- (XI) S is subjectively justified in believing that *p* iff S believes he has adequate evidence for *p*.
- (XII) S is cognitively justified in believing that *p* iff S is justified in believing that he has adequate evidence for *p*. (Vahid 1998, p. 287)

Alston rejects (X) as embodying deontological justification on the premise that deontological justification is essentially a concept about freedom from blameworthiness and this feature is lost in (X); he dismisses (XI) on the grounds

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<sup>38</sup> In fact he says there are four, but I'm leaving the fourth, motivational version, out for the sake of simplicity and, anyway, Alston thinks it is subsumable under (XII).

that it makes it too easy for one to be justified. So concludes Alston, (XII) best represents deontological justification. The problem, as Vahid sees it, is how to cash out what is involved in the justification of the higher-order belief, or as he puts it, "the sense in which 'justified' is used on the RHS of 'iff'" (Vahid 1998, p. 289). Or, rather, the problem is that Alston himself cashes it out in his own *Je*. So deontological justification turns out for Alston to be something like:

DJ: S is deontologically justified in believing that *p* just in case S is *Je* in believing that he has adequate evidence for *p*.

The trouble according to Vahid is that (a) this definition does not seem all that deontological anymore, and more importantly (b) rules out case like Alston's "cultural isolation" and "cognitive deficiency" case (see Chapter 4) as cases where a subject is granted deontological justification. This is because in neither of the two cases are the subject's higher level beliefs about the adequacy of their grounds *as a matter of fact* adequate. Defining deontological justification in the manner above then renders it "no longer relevant whether or not the cognizer is to blame for failing to discover the adequacy of the reasons for *p*" (Vahid 1998, p. 291). So if there is a consilience failure in these cases it is not *due* to defining epistemic justification in deontic terms but from the common acknowledgement that justification does not guarantee truth since "it follows that S can be *Je* in believing that his evidence for *p* is adequate, thus satisfying the RHS of the definition, and yet the evidence be *in fact* inadequate" (Vahid 1998, p. 291). So Alston's cases merely *illustrate* cases of consilience failure, they do not reveal the

source of the discrepancy between justification and truth as somehow inextricably linked to the deontological conception.

However, although these considerations show that there is a problem with the way Alston sets up his target, I think they are unsuccessful in showing that cases of consilience failure do not pose a problem (*specifically*) for the deontological conception. Vahid seems to think that Alston's "oscillations" from the voluntarism problem and the consilience problem as "symptomatic of the deeper problem of how exactly the distinction between deontic and nondeontic conceptions of justification should be drawn, and how to express the underlying intuitions" (Vahid 1998, p. 296). But I do not think the problems are as separate as all that, making Alston's oscillations understandable. The problem concerning doxastic voluntarism showed us just how difficult it is to make demands on our higher-level beliefs. If the proper mode of deontological justification is the cognitive mode (XII), then the demand on the higher level belief cannot itself be couched in the cognitive mode without inviting a vicious regress. Nevertheless, as I already mentioned in Chapter 3, there is something at best inconsistent about a deontic conception that is merely evaluative with respect to higher-level beliefs. But as I suggested, perhaps the best way for the deontological conception to go is to steer clear from making any justificatory demands on higher-order beliefs outside their co-inciding with those at a lower-level. This, again as I highlighted in Chapter 4, makes cases of consilience failure especially problematic, for there

is no guarantee that a consistent set of beliefs is any more likely to yield truth than a maximally inconsistent one.

Nevertheless, Vahid suggests another line of defence to take against the problem of consilience failure. All that Alston shows is that one can be deontologically justified without being *Je*. This can only tell against the deontological conception if, and only if, believing on adequate, truth-conducive grounds is an *essential* feature of epistemic justification. And it does seem like it is this feature that regulates Alston's critique since deontological justification, as he puts it:

...fails to capture what we are looking for in epistemology under the rubric of "justification", when we are looking for something in the neighbourhood of "being in a favourable position in believing that *p*", favourable from the standpoint of the aim at believing the true and avoiding the false. (Alston 1989 (b), p. 149)

As Vahid points out, however, the premise that believing on truth-conducive grounds is an essential feature of epistemic justification, has only been assumed and this fails to give a fair hearing to the deontological conception:

If the problem is to adjudicate between deontological and truth-conducive conceptions of justification, then by taking truth conductivity to be an essential feature of epistemic justification we have already identified the winning side. (Vahid 1998, p. 296)

If we fail to make the consilience assumption, then, argues Vahid, what Alston's arguments seem to suggest is some sort of "tolerant pluralism in justification theory". There appears to be something right about the claim that our concept of what epistemic justification should take into account the truth conductivity of our

grounds of belief, but there seems to be something equally right about our being subject to certain epistemic obligations, so that:

In epistemology, too, perhaps we should resign ourselves to working with distinct interpretations of its key concept, in much the same way that it has been suggested we should also proceed with respect to the key concept of such multifaceted disciplines as probability theory. (Vahid 1998, p. 298)

Alston does, later (Alston 2005), argue that truth-conducivity is *the* core feature of the epistemic and I will evaluate his arguments for this claim in due course. Meanwhile I am now going to try to further the case for pluralism about epistemic justification as well as see what it might look like. To do so I am going to look at what Stephen Hetherington has called the “responsibilism dilemma” (Hetherington 2002, p. 399).

#### *5.4 The Responsibilism Dilemma*

Hetherington asks: “might epistemic justification be, to some substantive extent, a function of epistemic responsibility – a belief’s being formed, or its being maintained, in an epistemically responsible way? (Hetherington 2002, p. 398) It seems that if we are minded to have a deontological conception of epistemic justification, we need to answer “yes” to that question, but, argues Hetherington, once we try to work out exactly what the notion of epistemic responsibility consists in we find a dilemma which “reveals how fundamentally misaligned are the concepts of epistemic responsibility and epistemic justification” (Hetherington 2002, p. 403). Hetherington begins to formulate what he calls “the responsibilism dilemma” by making a distinction between

responsibility-for and responsibility-in. Making an analogy with ethics, we would say that a person could be morally responsible for performing an action without being morally responsible in performing it. For example, we would say that a murderer was responsible for committing the atrocities he did and that he *was not* acting *in* a responsible manner. Similarly, *mutatis mutandis*, because being epistemically justified entails positive appraisal, being epistemically responsible for believing that *p* cannot entail being justified in (or being responsible in) holding that belief. Responsibility-for is thus only a necessary, and not sufficient, condition for epistemic justification, since responsibility, so understood, is a matter of control irrespective of whether or not that control is exercised well or badly. So, fairly trivially, we have the first horn of Hetherington's dilemma:

RespD1      To the extent that epistemic responsibility-for is not strong enough to be epistemic responsibility-in, it is too weak to constitute the presence of epistemic justification. (Hetherington 2002, p. 400)

The second horn of Hetherington's dilemma is less trivial. Again to make the analogy with ethics, moral responsibility is usually held to involve the principle of alternate possibilities, which we can recast in terms of belief as follows:

PAPB      A person is epistemically responsible for his forming a specific belief, only if (in the same circumstances as he is in prior to forming that belief) he could have done other to form it. (Hetherington 2002, p. 401)

Now, to avoid the first horn of the dilemma and paint responsibility-for in a strong enough fashion to be sufficient for epistemic responsibility-in, we need to make PAPB into PAPB\*:

PAPB\*      A person is epistemically responsible *in* his forming a specify belief, only if (in the same circumstances as he is in prior to forming that belief) he could have done otherwise. (Hetherington 2002, p. 402 *my italics*)

Note that neither PAPB or PAPB\* entail doxastic voluntarism, or at least not *direct* doxastic voluntarism, since each merely demands that one have some freedom of doxastic action or outcome and not that one can choose freely what one believes. More importantly, endorsing PAPB\* “has dire consequences for responsibilism” (Hetherington 2002, p. 402), because an agent who was perfectly rational could not be epistemically responsible in having the beliefs they do, since they could not have done otherwise than form their beliefs in a perfectly rational way. Yet it is exactly those kind of believers who, we would want to say, embody what it is to be epistemically justified. The notion of epistemic responsibility is thus too strong. So we get the second horn of the dilemma:

RespD2      To the extent that epistemic-responsibility-for is strong enough to be epistemic-responsibility-in, it is too strong to constitute the presence of epistemic justification. (Hetherington 2002, p. 401)

Either epistemic-responsibility-for is not strong enough to constitute epistemic responsibility-in, in which case it is too weak for epistemic justification, or else epistemic-responsibility-for is strong enough to be epistemic-responsibility-in,



but in that case it will be too strong for epistemic justification. So we are in a bind as to how to formulate responsibilism.

For my present purposes I am not all that interested in the dilemma formulated here in itself, but, rather, what is taken to be a reply to it. Gordon Barnes (Barnes 2002) makes two replies to Hetherington, the first I think is uninteresting and is raised only to be rejected by Barnes himself. The second I think fruitful and interesting, and chimes in with Vahid's suggested pluralism about justification. The first reply brought up by Barnes is to concede to Hetherington that responsibility (for) is not a necessary condition for being justified, but that it is a necessary condition for being *unjustified*, and, further, that one is justified just in case one is not unjustified. So a perfectly rational being, such as God, would after all be justified in holding their beliefs since they are not unjustified in holding them. However, as Barnes himself notes, the reply is unsuccessful since making this caveat fails to rule-in clearly unjustified beliefs. For example, someone who could not do otherwise but form their beliefs in an irrational way, could not be said to be unjustified when they formed their irrational belief that  $p$  at  $t$ . So then responsibility cannot be a condition for being unjustified either.

I am not that sure that this first reply is quite so bad. Do our intuitions so strongly point us in the direction of saying that the man who could not reason otherwise was unjustified in his belief? And, further, is there any sense in which

our intuitions point us in the direction of saying that the perfectly rational believer is somehow beyond the scope of justification, "no more than we would say that a calculator was justified in its display, or a thermometer justified in its reading" (Barnes 2002, p. 418)? But there is the rub of Barnes' next reply, for even granting Hetherington's intuitions to say 'no' to both of the above, it would not mean, argues Barnes, that responsibilism is thereby false: "perhaps an essentially rational being would be justified in *some* sense of that term, but not in another, equally important sense" (Barnes 2002, p. 418). And it might, further, be the other sense that the responsibilist is concerned about. The strategy is then to deny that typically epistemic terms such as "knows" or "is justified in believing" are strictly univocal, and that

speakers use such terms to express many and various properties in various contexts. If this is correct then we can reconcile responsibilism with the intuition that an essentially perfectly rational being would be "justified" in some sense of that term. (Barnes 2002, p. 418)

So Barnes' conclusion here resembles that of Vahid in positing some sort of pluralism about justification, i.e. that there could be various ways in which one could be said to have epistemic justification, and that neither one is *the* way in which justification should be characterised. This strategy is useful in avoiding the responsibilism dilemma as well as circumventing the problem of consilience failure for the deontological conception, since satisfying the demands made by consilience are "desiderata" for only one, not any more fundamental, way of construing what epistemic justification is all about. As it stands here, the strategy

seems a little *ad hoc*, as no independent motivation (besides circumventing problems) has not been provided. William Alston has, in his most recent work (Alston 1993, 2005), provided some arguments for a similar view about justification that he calls the “epistemic desiderata” view. So in the next section of this chapter I will try to motivate the view by citing his arguments for it. However, Alston also argues that even taking a pluralist view about justification does not remedy the situation for the deontologist<sup>39</sup>. I will argue against this being the case in the chapter which follows but concede that some alterations about the way we take epistemic justification to be a deontological concept need to be made.

### 5.5 “Epistemic Desiderata”

Recently Alston has argued (Alston 1993, 2005) that “we should abandon the idea that there is something or other properly called ‘epistemic justification’” (Alston 1993, p. 527) and that there is no one essential property that picks out what it is for someone to have epistemic justification. Alston picks out six different candidates for what would constitute a necessary condition for justification, all of which, he argues, should at best be construed as “desiderata”, and all the opponents of which no not deny are necessary conditions for knowledge. They are: (1) The basing relation (the idea that for a belief to be justified it is necessary for that belief not simply to be appropriately grounded, but that it be grounded *for me* by that appropriate ground); (2) Truth-conducivity

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<sup>39</sup> Note that Alston only brings in this extra feature in Alston 2005, it does not figure in Alston 1993.

(the demand that the basis of a belief be actually indicative of the truth of that belief for it to count as being justified); (3) Cognitive accessibility (a subject must be aware of what is justifying his belief if he is to have epistemic justification); (4) Higher-level requirements (the demand that *S*'s higher level belief about the status of his belief that *p* be justified for *S* to be justified in believing that *p*); (5) Coherence (for *S* to be justified in believing that *p*, *S*'s belief that *p* must cohere with a total system of beliefs that itself exhibits a high degree of coherence); (6) Satisfying intellectual obligations (*S* is justified just in case *S* has satisfied their intellectual obligations<sup>40</sup>) (Alston 1993, p. 528 – 533).

So, according to Alston, given that there is so much variance among what differing epistemologists take to be the central concept of epistemic justification, it seems unlikely that there is enough commonality in the different parties' pre-theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under consideration,

it seems, rather, that they are highlighting, emphasizing, "pushing" different concepts, all called 'justification'. It seems...that they are selecting different epistemic desiderata, or packages thereof, as deserving of the honorific title 'justification'. (Alston 1993, p. 534)

If that is the case then when there are disputes about what constitutes epistemic justification, none of (1) – (6) can be deployed in an attempt to specify what the debate is about without begging the question against one another. No wonder debates with regard to, for example, externalist vs. internalism, responsibilism vs. reliabilism, coherentism vs. foundationalism seem to persist. However,

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<sup>40</sup> Alston 1993 cites the exercise of an intellectual virtue under (6) as an allied idea, Alston 2005 presents such an exercise as a stand alone desiderata see Alston 2005, p. 20.

although the “the persistence of these disputes leads to the suspicion that there is no unique common item concerning the nature of which people are disagreeing” (Alston 1993, p. 532), the mere persistence of these issues does not establish the lack of a common element about which the debates are about. We need some further arguments to establish this. Alston’s strategy is to accept that it is possible that we may share a common concept without being able to formulate a common definition, but that, nevertheless, we “want some reason for thinking that a single concept is, indeed, shared” (Alston 1993, p. 537). So the argumentative strategy now turns to denying those reasons that could be given for thinking that there is, or need to be, a shared concept.

The first reason Alston raises that could be taken to indicate the need for a shared concept is that the ‘epistemic point of view’ is usually defined in terms of the aim at maximising truth and avoiding falsehood. This cannot, however, argues Alston, serve to pick identify what is distinctive about epistemic justification because there are many desirable features of a belief that may not contribute to achieving that end, this follows from the fact that “true beliefs can be unjustified and, false beliefs can be justified” (Alston 1993, p. 535). Maximising truth and avoiding falsehood is indeed a desirable property for a belief to have but, as has already been pointed out, all of (1) – (6) pick out desirable properties and none of them can be enlisted, without begging the question, to describe what is being allegedly discussed.

The second way an epistemologist might try to identify the distinctive feature of epistemic justification is to define it as that which turns true belief into knowledge. Or, more precisely, to define justification as that component that would turn true belief into knowledge in a way that deals with those notorious Gettier cases<sup>41</sup>. However, argues Alston, this definition does not really serve to pick out the proper way to think about justification in a neutral way because different theories about what justification is, recognise different criteria for what counts as justification, "and should it turn out that what turns true belief into knowledge does not recognize those constraints they would not recognize it as justification" (Alston 1993, p. 536). Suppose a reliabilist comes up with a way of understanding justification (in a suitably reliabilist fashion) that very convincingly turns true belief into knowledge in a way that circumvents Gettier problems, so convincingly in fact that the internalist is also convinced. Would the internalist then identify epistemic justification with reliability? Not, according to Alston, "unless he undergoes a drastic philosophical personality change" (Alston 1993, p. 536), since the 'justification' in question would not possess the qualities the internalist saw as necessary for epistemic justification. What the internalist would infer from this scenario, suggests Alston, is that they were mistaken in thinking that it is justification that turns true belief into knowledge, not that justification must be couched in reliabilist terms. Of course, the internalist may not in fact make this last inference, but the point is that it would be legitimate for

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<sup>41</sup> i.e. those cases that demonstrate that justified true belief is not sufficient for knowledge.

them to do so. So trying to determine what is distinctive about justification by appeal to that which turns true belief into knowledge fails.

Again, however, all these considerations show is that we cannot independently formulate what the common concept of justification might be, they do not show that one is not *as a matter of fact* shared. Are there not, for example, paradigm cases that all epistemologists take as exemplars of justification and non-justification? There may be, but, argues Alston, what differing sides take as the hallmark of justification will “deeply infect” how they view the particular exemplar. For example, internalists will view the beliefs a subject has in a Cartesian evil genius world as the same beliefs that are justified in a normal world. The externalist will view the scenario in the opposite way. Consider once again Hetherington’s example of a perfectly rational believer – our intuitions regarding what we take as justification’s core feature will determine whether we intuit the believer within or without the realm of justification. Alston does not wish to deny that there may be a large body of cases that everyone agrees on, but argues that “there are quite different ways of extrapolating from these cases to other cases. And so, on this way of construing concepts, these different patterns of extrapolating from the paradigms would determine different concepts” (Alston 1993, p. 537).

#### 5.6 Concluding Remarks to Chapter 5

The upshot of all these considerations, concludes Alston, is that what look like different opinions about what is required for the application of the common

concept of justification are really different selections of epistemic desiderata, none of which completely capture the essence of what epistemic justification consists in. Why? Because there is, really, no one thing that could do that. Ironically then, Alston seems, in the end, to answer his own charge against the deontological conception in coming up with a position akin to Vahid's "tolerant pluralism" - if (6) the fulfilling of epistemic obligations is a different desideratum to that of (2) truth conducivity, then it looks like it is question begging to deny (6) in terms of its failure by (2). We must, however, keep in mind two reservations: firstly that what we are calling 'justification' here has altered, so the deontological conception of epistemic justification has not remained unchanged. Secondly, now that the goal of acquiring true beliefs and avoiding false ones has been severed from that of abiding by one's epistemic obligations, we must ask what exactly it is that makes these obligations particularly *epistemic*. In the end, Alston's position is not as "tolerant" as is first presented, as I shall show in the next chapter, and it is the deontologist's failure to answer this last question that motivates Alston, in his latest book, to raise "serious questions as to the viability of deontological desiderata" (Alston 2005, p. 58). In the following chapter I discuss these reservations further and I will argue against Alston's claim that deontological desiderata are not viable, doing so, however, will require a close look at what it is we call *epistemic*.



## Chapter 6: Epistemic Right and Good

### 6.1 The Persistence of the "Truth Problem"

At the end of Chapter 5 it was proposed that, as a response to the problem of conciliatory failures for the deontological conception, we take a sort of pluralist line about epistemic justification. The claim is that there is no *one* unique concept that captures the essence of what epistemic justification is about, and that the different demands made on what it takes for epistemic agents to be justified (such as coherence, cognitive accessibility, truth conductivity, and the satisfying of epistemic obligations) are best viewed as different "desiderata" (being conflated with the term "justification") each valuable from the epistemic point of view. However, again as was suggested at the end of Chapter 5, this is not strictly speaking a defence of the deontological conception of epistemic *justification*, since what is now being countenanced is the rejection of the viability of talk of justification. This considerably weakens the purchase of the deontic conception as it is now applicable only in a particular epistemic domain. Further, because these differing demands are viewed as *epistemic* desiderata, there is another sense in which the response is just a palliative for the deontological conception in that, because we have severed the goal of truth conductivity from that of fulfilling our epistemic obligations, the deontic conception now faces the question of what precisely is epistemic about those obligations we are supposed to abide by. In this Chapter, I make some considerations as to what it is to say that something is *epistemic*, and consider the repercussions of this on the

deontological conception. I will suggest that "epistemic" obligations, under a the deontic conception, are best viewed as categorical imperatives and suggest that although the problem of identifying the epistemic is a problem at the level of obligations (deontological level), it is not a problem at the level of reasons (evaluative level). In the chapters which follow, I will further develop how keeping this distinction in mind, amongst some other considerations, abrogates the problem of identifying the epistemic for the deontological conception.

## 6.2 *Saying 'Epistemic'*

It seems intuitive to say that epistemic justification is independent of, or at least different to, other sorts of justification (say ethical, or practical justification)<sup>42</sup>. So what is it that renders justification particularly epistemic? To confer epistemic justification on *S*'s believing that *p* is to appraise *S*'s believing that *p*, positively from an epistemic point of view, i.e. from the epistemic standard of appraisal. The epistemic standard of appraisal is nearly always<sup>43</sup> taken to be the increase of the likelihood of having true beliefs and avoiding false ones<sup>44</sup>, since, as Lawrence Bonjour puts it:

if finding epistemically justified beliefs did not substantially increase the likelihood of finding true ones, epistemic justification would be irrelevant to our main cognitive goal and of dubious worth. It is only if we have some reason to think that epistemic justification constitutes a path to truth that we as cognitive human beings have any motive for preferring

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<sup>42</sup> I'll say more about the relationship between ethical and epistemic justification in Chapter 8.

<sup>43</sup> In fact, I cannot find anyone who disagrees with this except, perhaps, Stich 1990.

<sup>44</sup> It is usually taken to be the double standard of having true beliefs and avoiding false ones, so that one cannot satisfy it by believing everything and, or by believing nothing.

epistemically justified beliefs to epistemically unjustified ones. (Bonjour 1985, p.8)<sup>45</sup>

One might, alternatively, attempt to delineate the epistemic with reference not to the standard of appraisal, but to the *object* of epistemic appraisal, i.e. beliefs<sup>46</sup>. Or indeed with regard to both the object and the standard: beliefs and their relationship to truth<sup>47</sup>. Both of these last ways deny that one can believe for non-epistemic reasons or that there can be epistemic reasons for action – so that beliefs, and only beliefs, are appropriate for epistemic scrutiny. However, I think that we can have non-epistemic reasons for belief and epistemic reasons for action, so that delineating the epistemic domain with regard to the object of epistemic appraisal is too strong. I'll leave arguing for this view until Chapters 7 and 8, so for now let's look at how the aim of having true beliefs and avoiding false ones can be used as the standard by which to pick out *epistemic* justification.

Paul Moser explicitly attempts to “explain the distinction between epistemic and non-epistemic reasons for belief” (Moser 1989, p. 47), so looking at his discussion might be a good place to start. Moser's discussion provides us with three central points: (i) that, for a given subject, an epistemic reason is essentially just an indication that the proposition believed is true. Here Moser makes a distinction between a *belief state* and the propositional object of that state. Because belief states cannot be either true or false and if epistemic reasons

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<sup>45</sup> See also the extensive citing of passages of this sort in David 2001, pp. 151-152. He concludes: ‘These passages come from advocates of various approaches to epistemology... But our theme is clearly discernable in all of them. Truth is either explicitly referred to as a goal or aim, or it is implicitly treated as such.’

<sup>46</sup> This view is intimated in Audi 2001 and Skorupski 2005.

<sup>47</sup> The view usually held by “evidentialists” see Adler 2002 and Feldman and Conee 2003.

are, for a believer, an indication of the truth of their belief, then it follows that epistemic reasons apply not to belief states but to their propositional objects. On the contrary, non-epistemic reasons, claims Moser, are not indications of the truth of a proposition but indications that a belief has a particular property. For example, prudential reasons for a believer "indicate that one's belief state is prudentially valuable for someone, but do not thereby indicate that the believed proposition is true...It might be prudent for me to believe, for example, that I shall recover from an illness even though there is no indication whatsoever that I shall recover" (Moser 1989, pp. 48 - 49). We can distinguish epistemic reasons for belief from non-epistemic reasons simply by identifying what given reasons indicate for the believer: if they indicate that a belief *state* has a particular property, non-epistemic reasons are being offered; if they indicate the truth of the propositional object of a belief state, epistemic reasons are being offered.

(ii) Moser contrasts epistemic reasons with *explanatory* reasons for having a belief. An explanatory reason is "a reason that explains why a belief state has been formed or maintained" (Moser 1989, p. 49). According to Moser, it is clear that an explanation as to why a belief is being held is not an indication of the truth of its propositional object. Further, an epistemic reason for a believed proposition is not always the explanatory reason for having the believed state: "conceivably what explains why a belief state has been formed or maintained is one thing, and what indicates that the proposition thereby believed is true is quite another" (Moser 1989, p. 49).

(iii) According to Moser, for a subject to have epistemic reasons for believing that  $p$  is for the subject to have an *indication that  $p$  is true*. However, he adds the caveat that "truth indicator" is to be interpreted as designating "anything that provides an indication for one that a proposition is true in the sense that it makes the proposition true *to some extent* for one" (Moser 1989, p. 50) thus highlighting the "minimal" conditions for epistemic reasons for belief. Why is this caveat made? Moser wants his definition of epistemic reasons to differ from those that hold that epistemic reasons are simply indicators that a belief state is "epistemically good" i.e. that the belief state is related to an *actually* true proposition. For Moser, to have an epistemic reason is for a belief state to be accompanied by an *indication* of the truth of the appropriate proposition, and it must be an indication *to some extent* in order not to contradict, "the commonplace notion of a justified false proposition or an unjustified true proposition" and, further, that one may have reasons for belief but not thereby be justified in believing it, so that "a truth indicator need not make a proposition sufficiently probable to satisfy the justification condition" (Moser 1989, p. 49). Moser's project then consists in developing the notion of "to some extent" evidential probability makers, but I won't say anymore about that here, since I will argue that while Moser's account is not hopeless, conditions (i) –(iii) are problematic.

I take (iii) to be the least problematic of the three. Nevertheless the phrase "to some extent" needs to be unpacked using non-metaphorical language and when one tries to do that in terms of evidential probability makers (as Moser

indeed tries) it quickly becomes apparent how difficult it is to determine, non-arbitrarily, the probability “threshold” of what counts as “to some extent”. Moser thinks this can be done, but to do so involves long discussions about probability theory that I think end up begging lots of questions and provide, in the end, too untidy and cumbersome an account of what is being discussed, namely epistemic reasons for belief. Of course, that on its own is no reason to reject Moser’s account. However, consider the problems raised by (ii) and (i). (ii) states that epistemic reasons are not *explanatory* reasons, since the explanation as to why a belief is held is not an indication of the truth of a proposition. But this clearly goes against what many epistemologists think is a requirement for epistemic justification (and thereby an epistemic reason), i.e. the requirement of the basing relation (see Chapter 5.5) – the idea that for S to have a reason to believe that *p*, S must believe that *p* for *that* reason<sup>48</sup>. Now, Moser may argue that the basing relation does not identify any *sufficient* feature of what it is to have *epistemic* reasons for belief, and that may be true, but because epistemologists take the basing relation to be a *necessary* feature of an epistemic reason then Moser’s account seems too strong in ruling such a feature out. Or, at least, Moser owes us an explanation as to why such a feature is ruled out, and such an explanation is not offered.

As regards (i), it seems inappropriate to distinguish epistemic reasons from other reasons on the grounds that only epistemic reasons indicate the truth

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<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Pollock 1986 and Harman 1973.

of the propositional object of a belief state, without *already* having ruled out Cognitivism about, say, moral reasons – i.e. the view that moral appraisals have propositional content and thereby have truth-conditions. I may, according to the Cognitivist in ethics, believe that lying is wrong for moral reasons, and that those *moral* reasons indicate the truth of the proposition. Under this view, perhaps what would determine whether one was in the presence of an epistemic or an ethical reason, would be the type of truth-maker each proposition had. Regardless of whether or not this last move is legitimate, one cannot distinguish what counts as epistemic reasons on the grounds that only they have a bearing on the truth of their propositional object without saying something about why Cognitivism about other reasons has been rejected, and, again, such an explanation fails to be offered by Moser. It would, needless to say, be highly question-begging to rule out Cognitivism on the grounds that all non-epistemic reasons only ever indicate whether a belief state has a particular property. Although none of these considerations on their own *refute* Moser's proposal, I think they do enough, taken together, to establish that the proposal is, at the very least, problematic.

Nevertheless, even though there might be something problematic about saying that all and *only* epistemic reasons are indications of the truth of a belief, there does seem something right about the claim that the *basic or most fundamental* epistemic aim is to countenance true beliefs and avoid believing false ones, and that *epistemic* appraisal is apportioned relative to that aim. Where, perhaps, the

most *basic* aim by which ethical reasons are appraised is the aim to maximise the good, for example. Yet, there does not seem to be an argument available to prove this. All that can be done, in order to convince, is ask: what else *could* distinguish the epistemic? And as Alston answers: "I don't know anything that is more obvious from which it could be derived" (Alston 2005, p. 30). Yet it is one thing for the aim to appear obvious, another for it to be a tenable one in the light of the theoretical baggage that the concept of epistemic justification carries. In the next section I explore what I take to be a fundamental problem with this putative epistemic aim.

### 6.3 *The Reductio Argument*

Consider how both the truth goal and epistemic justification came to be introduced to the epistemological armoury. Beginning with the latter, epistemic justification seems to have been introduced to accommodate the intuition that true belief alone is insufficient for knowledge – a lucky guess, we are told, cannot count as a case of knowledge. So the justification condition is there to eliminate lucky guesses from counting as cases of knowledge. How does it do this? It does so because of the alleged counterfactual that a belief that is justified is also more likely to be true than one that is not: worlds where a subject is believing justifiably are more likely to be worlds where the subject is believing the truth than in worlds where the subject is not believing justifiably. Thus the concept of justification gets inextricably linked with the aim of acquiring true beliefs and avoiding false beliefs.



Truth and belief are the non-epistemic components of the tripartite analysis, so if there is an epistemic aim then it must pertain to the justification condition. But epistemologists seem to feel the need for justification to be 'grounded' or 'anchored' to a non-epistemic component. This is in order to "break out of the circle" and prevent the account from being circular by specifying conditions for what counts as good epistemic practice in epistemic terms only. So the nominal epistemic aim is also brought about for the theoretical reason of 'grounding' justification to the non-epistemic components of knowledge, namely true belief<sup>49</sup>.

However, being justified in believing that *p* cannot (indeed should not) *guarantee* the truth of *p*. Justification must be fallible, we must allow for justified false beliefs and unjustified true beliefs. This is because, firstly, not doing so would make justification too demanding, something very few of us (if any) would ever be able to attain. This is a fallibilist intuition; though we must accept the possibility that our beliefs are radically wrong, we may still be justified in holding them, given what evidence is available to us at a given time. Secondly, there are again more theoretical reasons why this needs to be the case. Simply put, if every justified belief turns out to be a true belief and every unjustified belief turns out to be a false belief, then it is natural to question why we are bothering to make justification a condition for knowledge. If justification

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<sup>49</sup> This is presumably why true belief and not knowledge is taken to be the epistemic aim, as the knowledge goal would not serve this theoretical need of grounding justification in some non-epistemic ingredient, truth and belief (being those very non-epistemic ingredients to knowledge) serve that need much better. For an account, however, that does see knowledge as the epistemic aim see Jones 1997.

guaranteed truth and non-justification guaranteed falsehood, it follows that every false belief is unjustified and every true belief justified, so all we need stipulate as conditions for knowledge are true belief - for every true belief will also be justified. Going down this route means that justification shoots itself in the foot, knowledge collapses into true belief, and justification's theoretical role dissipates into impotence (Fumerton 1990) (Maitzen 1995) (Sartwell 1992). So, for intuitive and theoretical reasons, we must make the "fallibility" of justification a criterion relative to our epistemic aim. Our epistemic aim must allow for true beliefs that are unjustified and false beliefs that are justified. This is the first criterion we must demand of our epistemic aim: that it allow for justification to be "fallible"<sup>50</sup>.

Another criterion emerges, moreover, when we consider the truth goal in more detail. For, we can ask, does the truth goal pertain to the beliefs a subject will possess in the *long term*? It may be the case that we do indeed desire to possess the largest possible number of beliefs we can. However, this cannot be the aim of epistemic justification<sup>51</sup>. This is because we cannot have a justified belief achieving the truth goal via *causal* means. This is because, intuitively speaking, we want to say that a subject may or may not be justified in believing that *p* independently of the consequences that believing that *p* may produce. Take, for example, the proposition "I am not a good philosopher". Suppose that I

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<sup>50</sup> This demand for fallibility is probably what allows room for Gettier cases, for being justified in believing that *p* does not guarantee the truth of *p* in all possible worlds, see Nozick 1981.

<sup>51</sup> Though this may already cause a rift between why we intuitively think we ought to have the truth goal and why theoretically we ought to have it.

believe this proposition on the grounds that I have never attained a good mark in my assessed essays and exams, rarely come to grips with a philosophical argument and have never made a remark that bore any philosophical insight. Suppose, further, that believing this causes me to drop out of any further intellectual pursuit in favour of a career in brick-laying and hence that I come to have fewer true beliefs than I would have, albeit with difficulty, had I pursued an intellectual career (not that this would necessarily follow from my being a brick layer!). If the truth goal is a *diachronic* aim, the aim of believing truths and avoiding falsehoods in the *long run*, then it would mean that I would not be justified in believing that I was not a good philosopher despite the overwhelming evidence for it. This is just counter-intuitive. Similarly, adopting the truth goal as a diachronic aim would have the negative upshot of counting radically ill-conceived beliefs as justified beliefs if believing them caused the subject to later come to have more true beliefs than they would have had they not had the ill-conceived beliefs. To avoid a justified belief from having a causal role in bringing about the truth goal we must then make the truth goal a *synchronic* aim: "the goal of *now* having beliefs that are true and *now* not having beliefs that are false" (David 2001, p. 161). *Right now* (at time *t*) it will not pay, with regard to the truth goal, for me to have radically ill-conceived beliefs, and it *will* pay for me to have well-conceived or justified beliefs. This, then, is the second criterion we must demand for our epistemic aim: it must be a synchronic aim, rather than a diachronic aim.

So we now have two criteria to demand of our epistemic aim, (i) that it allow for justification to be fallible, and (ii) that it be a synchronic aim. The trouble is that demanding for both of these criteria to be satisfied presents us with a dilemma. This is because having the truth-goal as the epistemic aim means that, though we may be able to satisfy each criterion independently, we cannot satisfy both at the same time. If we construe the truth goal in a way that satisfies the first criterion then it cannot satisfy the second, and, conversely, if it satisfies the second it cannot satisfy the first. Marian David (David 2001) illustrates how this is the case. Following Richard Foley (Foley 1993), he asks: if the truth goal is a synchronic aim, the aim of *now* believing those propositions that are true and *now* not believing those that are false, then what will be the means by which to attain it? Will they be *constitutive* or *causal* means? One cannot achieve a synchronic goal via causal means, for causal means imply the passage of time. The truth goal must, then, be attained by constitutive means. However, as Foley puts it:

A constitutive means to a goal is itself part of the goal. For example, if we think of good health not just as a state in which you currently lack disease but also one in which you are not disposed to disease, then not having high blood pressure is not so much a causal means to the goal of good health as part of what it means to be in good health. Similarly, getting an A in your philosophy class is not a causal means to getting A's in your courses but rather part of what is involved in getting all A's. (Foley 1993, pp. 17-18)

So, if justification is seen as the means to attain the truth goal, and it does so *constitutively*, then we get into a situation where every true belief is justified and

every false belief unjustified: "The reason is, roughly, that with a synchronic goal only constitutive means count, and a constituent of the goal must always be a better constitutive means than a non-constituent" (David, p. 161). If a subject has an intuitively unjustified but true belief that  $p$  then according to the truth-goal, believing that  $p$  must be a good thing constitutively for it will serve the goal better than not believing that  $p$ . Conversely, an intuitively justified but false belief that  $p$  must be seen as a constitutively bad thing relative to the truth goal for it will serve the goal worse than not believing that  $p$ . So relative to the truth goal, all true beliefs are justified and all false beliefs unjustified<sup>52</sup>. By satisfying the criterion of synchronicity we violate the criterion regarding justification's fallibility vis-à-vis the truth goal. Thus, either justification is fallible vis-à-vis the truth goal but the truth goal is not a synchronic aim, or, the truth goal is a synchronic aim but justification is infallible. Both criteria cannot, at once, be met.

### 6.3 Responses to the dilemma

How do we respond to this dilemma? We may now be minded to reject the idea that the best way to distinguish epistemic justification is via appeal to its standards of appraisal, i.e. the truth goal, and to opt for distinguishing epistemic justification via appeal to the objects of its appraisal. This answer is unsatisfactory, however: though it may get the problem of "saying epistemic" temporarily off the hook, I hope to show that distinguishing the epistemic by appeal to the objects of appraisal is even more problematic in Chapters 7 and 8.

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<sup>52</sup> (David 2001) and (Maitzen 1995) call this the *reductio* argument.

Further, abandoning the claim that citing the truth goal is the best way to identify the epistemic, does not mean that the truth goal is not the correct epistemic aim. If it were not, lots of questions regarding why we bothered to give reasons (or justify) our beliefs would have to be answered. If these questions cannot be answered, then the above strategy does nothing to remedy the bind the truth goal and epistemic justification are in. Another alternative would be to abandon the fallibility requirement. But again this seems like a ludicrous plan, since it would mean that every justified belief would always also be a true one, and we would then have to seriously question the project of identifying epistemic reasons at all. This leaves us with what I take to be the most fruitful alternative: re-thinking the way that the truth goal can be fulfilled.

I think we need to re-question whether constitutive means are the only means by which to attain the epistemic aim, and thus question whether the truth goal should be considered a *synchronic* aim. Recall that the reason that the truth goal is considered to be a synchronic aim is to block the idea that someone could be justified for holding a false belief on very inadequate grounds because holding that belief would *cause* the bearer subsequently to hold lots of true ones. Now, I think it is important to notice that it is irrelevant here whether or not the belief is false or not, since the consideration is meant to leave open the possibility that one can have false but justified beliefs, and true but unjustified ones. Consequently what is important here is that the bearer of the belief is holding it on inadequate grounds, but would be "justified" in holding the belief they do if

it would cause them to have more true, and less false, beliefs than they would if they did not hold it. What is wrong with having a belief held on inadequate grounds? The intuition we are being urged to evoke is that a belief based on such grounds would always be *unjustified* (since they would be unlikely to be true). Thus that someone could *not* be justified (i.e. not fulfil the truth goal in the correct way) if what was justifying their belief was its causal relation to other possible true beliefs. But it seems that here we have smuggled in, *from the start*, the way of talking about justification that aligns itself to the truth goal in the synchronic way. So it looks like the complaint runs something like: the truth goal must be a synchronic aim because if it were a diachronic aim it could not be satisfied by criteria determined by the truth goal being a synchronic aim.

Or, we could be minded to answer that we base our beliefs on adequate grounds because we think that doing so would increase the likelihood of our beliefs being true and decrease the likelihood of their being false. I think this answer is fine, but note that here the truth goal is a *diachronic* aim, for what we are interested is that our beliefs *in the long run* turn out more likely to be true. Thus, in keeping with the fallibility requirement, it allows room for unjustified true beliefs and justified false ones. So what makes a belief unjustified here is that it is not based on adequate grounds, what makes it unjustified is not determined by whether or not it fulfils the truth goal (although we base our beliefs on adequate grounds to fulfil the truth goal). Are the two extensionally equivalent? i.e. are the beliefs which are based on adequate evidence *the same* beliefs that

fulfil the truth goal? Certainly not always, as it is *built in* to why we bother basing our beliefs on adequate evidence that many *justified* (i.e based on adequate evidence here) beliefs are very bad at fulfilling the truth goal, but that (hopefully!) most will not. For these reasons, then, I think that it is perfectly coherent that the truth goal be a diachronic aim. This is a positive result in that it gets us out of a dilemma, and, as I shall show in Chapter 8, positive in its support for the idea that there can be epistemic reasons for action and non-epistemic reasons for belief – a negative result, of course, from the point of view of the evidentialist.

#### 6.4 Alston on the Epistemic Point of View

In his latest book (Alston 2005), William Alston, citing Stephen Maitzen (Maitzen 1995), has addressed the *reductio* problem for the truth goal as the epistemic aim, or as Alston puts it:

Maitzen's specific point is that if *justification* is something that is positively valuable from the standpoint of the truth goal, it would have to be identified with truth. For what could be more valuable from the standpoint of an aim at truth than truth? (Alston 2005, p. 35)

Alston's reply to this problem consists of two steps. This first, as I discussed in Chapter 5, is to deny that there is one central notion of "justification" and opt instead for a *desiderata* approach, which makes room for a pluralism about the different things which are "desirable from the epistemic point of view" (Alston 2005, p. 23). But, of course, the question now is: what is the epistemic point of view? Alston's answer is, "that it is defined by the aim at maximising true belief



and minimising false belief" (Alston 2005, p. 23). However, and this is the second step of Alston's reply, this does not mean that truth is the only desirable feature from the epistemic point of view, even if that view is defined in terms of the truth goal. Why not?

The crucial point is that the most *basic* aim of cognition is not the only thing aimed at by cognition, not even the only thing aimed at from the standpoint of that most basic aim. That is because other features of belief are also desirable from the standpoint of that basic aim because they are related in various ways to it. (Alston 2005, p. 36)

So in keeping with his 1993 article (see Chapter 5.5) Alston denies that the truth goal can "even come close to picking out epistemic *justification*" (Alston 2005, p. 23) as "true beliefs can be unjustified and, false beliefs can be justified" (Alston 1993, p. 535). But now the move is, and this is not in the 1993 article, to make the truth goal the most *basic* aim, and that this does not entail it being the *only thing* aimed at from the standpoint of that aim. It is crucial to point out, however, that, under this view, only desiderata that are desirable in a "related" way to the truth goal can be called epistemic. Once we see how they can be so related, we will discover how this view has dire consequences for the deontological conception.

Alston divides what he sees as epistemic desiderata into five groups (Alston 2005 pp. 39 - 47). The first type of desiderata, which consists in fact of only one desideratum, and which he calls the "master desideratum", is truth. It is pretty obvious how having true beliefs might further the aim of having true beliefs and avoiding falsehoods, but perhaps it is more contentious for epistemologists to say this since they all agree that truth is neither necessary nor

sufficient for justification, so truth should not be seen as an *epistemic* desideratum. However, Alston is not talking about epistemic justification, and taking a pluralist line about epistemic desiderata allows for truth to be a (master) desideratum that can be more, or less, suitable "for the proximate goals of cognitive endeavour" than the other desiderata.

The second type of desideratum he calls "truth-conductive desiderata", which include, *inter alia*, having adequate evidence to believe that *p*, that one's belief that *p* be *based* on adequate evidence, that one's belief that *p* is the product of a reliable belief-forming procedure, and that one's belief that *p* was formed by the exercise of an intellectual virtue. All these desiderata are construed by Alston in a way that will entail that *p* will probably be true, and as such are the sort of desiderata that are appropriately related to the truth goal, and as such are *bona fide* epistemic desiderata.

The third type of desideratum Alston terms "desiderata that are thought to be favourable to the discrimination and formation of true beliefs", examples of these are:

[Subject] S has some high grade cognitive access to the evidence, and so on, for [belief] B (and perhaps to its sufficiency).

S has higher-level knowledge, or well-grounded belief, that B has a certain positive epistemic status and/or that such-and-such is responsible for that.

(Alston 2005, p. 43)

For Alston this type of desideratum cannot directly contribute towards the truth goal since they do not *render* any of the relevant beliefs more likely to be true.

Further, if one of these desiderata “were *limited* to *non-conducive* epistemic features, then it would not enjoy the right kind of connection with the goal of true belief to render it epistemically desirable” (Alston 2005, p. 44). However, says Alston, the general capacity to form higher-level beliefs (as above) is not so limited in that it contributes to our ability to acquire true beliefs and avoid acquiring false ones because it increases our ability in discerning the epistemic features of belief that are truth-conducive from those that are not. In this *indirect* way, then, these desiderata contribute towards the truth goal, and as such can be properly considered epistemic.

The fifth sort of desideratum (I will consider the fourth shortly) Alston considers is not obviously related to the truth goal at all, these include things such as *explanation*, *understanding*, *coherence* and *systematicity*. These might all be considered features of *systems* of belief that are desirable from the epistemic point of view. However, if the value of these aims lies outside the aim at truth, then what is it that makes these features epistemic? According to Alston, they do have an essential connection to the truth goal, albeit a slightly circuitous one. The connection is that although these desiderata fail to provide resources for producing true beliefs rather than false ones, their desirability *depends* on being associated with true belief. For example:

Explanations that do not provide the *true* reason why something happened are of no cognitive value qua explanations. In seeking to explain an occurrence, we want to find out what was in fact responsible for it, not just what might have conceivably produced it. And a coherent or otherwise systematic body of beliefs that are all or mostly false would

lack what we are after in seeking to render belief systems more coherent or systematic. (Alston 2005, p. 46)

For Alston, then, the question is whether we should allow as epistemic, desiderata whose desirability is over and above the truth goal, but which presuppose such a goal as a necessary condition of that very desirability. "In the absence of any sufficient reason to be hard nosed on this issue" (Alston 2005, p. 47), Alston allows for such cognitive goals to count as epistemic desiderata.

Finally however, we come to the fourth type of desideratum, "deontological" desiderata, which, not surprisingly, Alston does not regard as being genuinely epistemic. Among deontological desiderata, are those features of belief that this thesis has been all about, i.e. that they are held *permissibly* or *responsibly*, without the bearer of which violating any epistemic *obligation* regarding them. Alston now cites the reasons he has previously given to deny that these could be considered genuine epistemic desiderata, namely (as we saw in Chapter 3) that they violate the principle that ought implies can in their connection to doxastic involuntarism, and, more importantly (as we saw in Chapters 4 and 5) that they fail to hook up to the truth goal in the right way, although he allows for the possibility that:

Perhaps [they are] related to the truth goal in some other way that qualifies [them] as epistemically desirable. That is an abstract possibility. Why shouldn't there be a fourth way, as different from the first three as they are from each other? But I must confess that I have found no fourth way. (Alston 2005, p. 80)

In the absence of finding a fourth way, Alston concludes that deontological desiderata cannot be genuinely considered *epistemic* desiderata. And I must confess that, with Alston, I can find no fourth way either. We may be minded to reply that this rift only arises once we have defined what is epistemic with reference to the truth goal, and that is question-begging against the deontologist given that they want to define what counts as epistemic in a different way. But just what exactly is this way, and how does it identify epistemic reasons from other reasons? Again, with Alston, I find it very hard to think of criteria outside the truth goal that would do the trick. So I am forced to conclude that Alston's criticism goes through: appeals to "tolerant pluralism" about epistemic justification or a desiderata approach cannot remedy the situation for the deontological conception in the face of problems with consilience, for divorcing what is epistemic from the truth goal leaves us in too much of a state of ignorance as to what, precisely, we are talking about when we say "from the epistemic point of view".

#### 6.5. *Concluding Remarks*

In these three last chapters I hope to have shown just how troublesome the "Truth Problem" is for the deontological conception. We need to appeal to the truth goal as the epistemic aim if we are to make any sense of what it is to have an epistemic reason. So if the deontological conception does not hook up to that nominal epistemic aim in the right way, then we cannot just eschew that aim without the notion of what is epistemic beginning to slip, otherwise, as Crispin

Sartwell asks, "is there any reason to think that we have any distinctively epistemic obligations at all, in the absence of any overarching purpose for enquiry?" (Sartwell 1992, p. 170). I think, however, that while these considerations are in the end devastating for a deontological conception of *epistemic justification*, they do positively contribute towards a better understanding of what is involved in epistemic normativity. I propose that we use the distinction I started with in this thesis, between the level of obligations (typically considered the deontological level) and the purely evaluative level (which, I think, is the level at which reasons operate). Consider, further, that in citing the truth goal we are seeking a *teleological* (goal oriented) system on which to ground our epistemic obligations (i.e. that epistemic obligations are hypothetical imperatives<sup>53</sup>), but that perhaps a deontological conception is best viewed as regarding such obligations as *categorical* (non-teleological) imperatives. With these considerations in mind, I think we can take on board the consideration that obligations, viewed as such, are difficult to term epistemic, because this difficulty does not preclude epistemic reasons (at the evaluative level) contributing and playing a role, along with other sorts of reasons (e.g. practical, legal, aesthetic, moral), in determining the emergent obligation. So perhaps, because obligations are the result of a network of differing reasons with differing "forces" and "pressures", we would be mistaken to term them "epistemic", but not anymore than we would be mistaken in terming them

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<sup>53</sup> Such a view, that epistemic obligations are hypothetical imperatives, is expressed in Kornblith 1993.

"moral" (or legal etc.). To say that there is a reason for an action or a belief is to say that it has been positively evaluated to a certain extent vis-à-vis a certain norm or standard (hence we are tempted to call it "normative"), but in no way does a reason on its own (i.e. without regarding the whole network of reasons and the relevant situational constraints) can it be considered an *obligation* - reasons, on their own, may be action-guiding but not action-compelling. As it stands, this is just a sketch of the proposal I wish to promote. In the following part of this thesis, I wish to elaborate further upon it and make it more defensible. Doing so will require me to defend the idea that there can be epistemic reasons for action and non-epistemic reasons for belief. As we shall see, viewing the truth goal as a diachronic aim will help make these claims more plausible (particularly the claim that there can be epistemic reasons for action) - so in that sense, the considerations raised in this chapter have not been entirely negative! This will not be obvious until Chapter 8, however, because I shall start by looking at the evidentialist project of denying that there can be non-epistemic reasons for belief.

## ***PART THREE:***

### ***The Ethics of Belief***

#### ***Chapter 7: The Two Faces of Evidentialism***

##### ***7.1 Introduction***

In this chapter I hope to demonstrate two different (and seemingly independent) ways of interpreting the tenets of evidentialism and show why it is important to distinguish between them. These two ways correspond to those proposed by Richard Feldman (2000, 2004) and Jonathan Adler (1999, 2002). Feldman's way of interpreting evidentialism makes evidentialism a principle about epistemic *justification*, about what we *ought* to believe. Adler's, on the other hand, makes evidentialism a principle about how we *come* to believe, what it is, broadly speaking, *rational* for us to believe. Having identified this difference, I consider two complaints levied against evidentialism, namely what I call the threshold problem and what I call the availability problem, and hope to show that: (a) only an independent, bracketed justification principle of evidentialism can deal with those problems, that; (b) the rationality principle of evidentialism is not in fact independent from the justification principle; (c) the rationality principle is hard to motivate; and that (d) in the final analysis the argument for the justification principle depends on the rationality principle. I thus conclude that although it may be convenient for evidentialists to treat these two principles as independent, such an independence cannot be maintained.



## 7.2 Evidentialism about Justification or Rationality?

Evidentialism is a thesis that places believing in accord with adequate and available evidence at the pinnacle of our best doxastic practises. It claims that we always ought to follow our evidence. This, however, can mean several things. It can mean that we ought not to believe upon insufficient evidence because it is *ethically* wrong to do so. It can mean that the norms relevant to believing, from an *epistemic* point of view, must be based upon evidentialist principles. It can mean that evidentialist considerations are the *only* considerations relevant to the rational fixation of belief. And there are probably many other ways of interpreting the evidentialist tenet; however, for the purposes of this chapter I wish to consider only two, quite recent, interpretations of the thesis, namely due to Richard Feldman (Feldman 2000, 2004) and Jonathan Adler (Adler 1999, 2002). Feldman's formulation of evidentialism takes the thesis to be about *justification*, i.e. about what we are justified in believing, about what we ought to believe<sup>54</sup>. The extent to which someone believes in accordance with the available evidence is an index of whether they are justified in having the beliefs they do. As he puts it (I'm calling this principle j(E)):

j(E): For any person S, time t, and proposition p, if S has any doxastic attitude at all toward p, then S *epistemically* ought to have the attitude toward p supported by S's evidence at t. (Feldman 2000 p. 679, my italics.)

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<sup>54</sup> Which he takes to be equivalent.

For Feldman, then, evidentialism is not a thesis about justification *tout court*, it is a thesis about *epistemic* justification. This is because he is limiting the evidentialist tenet to the epistemic domain – it is only from an epistemic perspective that one ought to believe according to the available evidence. I’m going to call this limiting of evidentialist scope to the epistemic domain, the *bracketing function* (hence E is in brackets in j(E)).

By contrast, Adler sees evidentialism as a thesis not about what makes a belief in a proposition justified but, rather, about the question regarding “what the nature of belief itself demands” (Adler 1999, p. 268) – he calls this an *intrinsic* approach (where Feldman’s approach would be *extrinsic*). For Adler, believing in accord with evidence is a requirement dictated by the nature of belief itself. Exploring what the nature of belief is, according to Adler, tells us something about how we *come* to believe, but not what makes a belief justified, because:

If, under ideal conditions, I cannot help but believe when I recognise that the evidence establishes that *p*, it makes no sense to say that I ought to believe that *p*. (Adler 2002, p. 51)

However, this does not restrict Adler’s account to a merely descriptive level, since we can test judgements about what we should and should not believe “against the data of what we do (and so can) actually believe when we focus on the claims inherent in our believing a proposition” (Adler 2002, p. 52). We will see more about how such tests can be conducted in 7.5. Adler describes what a “correct’ belief (i.e. one that would pass the test above) as follows:

One's believing that *p* is proper (i.e., in accord with the concept of belief) if and only if one's evidence establishes that *p* is true. (Adler 2002, p. 51)

Such talk of proper and (by implication) improper belief, invokes the vocabulary of rationality (broadly construed), since an improper belief (a belief that was not in accord with the nature of belief) would seem to suggest that such a belief was irrational<sup>55</sup>. So we may then interpret this way of taking evidentialism as telling us something about what sort of considerations determine the rationality of belief: namely, evidential considerations. This principle can be formulated as such:

rE: If a subject *S* takes a rational (or proper) doxastic attitude towards a proposition *p* at time *t*, then *S* (by definition) cannot but have taken the doxastic attitude that *S*'s evidence at *t* suggested (including believing, disbelieving, and withholding belief). Only evidentialist considerations determine the rationality of belief (or of doxastic attitudes in general).

Richard Foley calls this kind of principle "epistemic chauvinism":

Evidentialism, then, embodies a kind of epistemic chauvinism: Epistemic reasons for believing something by their very nature are thought superior to non-epistemic reasons for believing. Indeed, they are thought to be so superior that it is always rational, all things considered, to believe only that for which one has good epistemic reasons (Foley 1987, p. 213).

So under this view, we *cannot* rationally believe for non-epistemic reasons. It may be tempting to read rE as entailing, by extension, that it cannot ever be *ethically* wrong to believe upon insufficient evidence, because of it claims that there are no such things as non-epistemic reasons for belief (and as such reasons for belief lie

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<sup>55</sup> Adler does not like talk of 'rationality', however, as he thinks it is too tied up with an extrinsic approach. However, if we interpret 'rationality' broadly, as telling us something about the nature of belief or how we *come* to believe, as opposed to what *justifies* belief, then nothing of import is lost by using this vocabulary. — — —

outside the ethical domain). I think this would be an incorrect reading, however. Some sort of extra rider, arguing that evidential considerations can only ever be *epistemic* considerations, would be necessary in order to maintain this claim; it is not obvious that evidential considerations are only epistemic considerations - believing according to adequate evidence may be a function of my being able to act in support of the best ethical consequences, for instance. rE has no such rider, and it does not need one to make it plausible, so we need not read it in this way. Neither does rE make the implausible claim that non-evidential considerations never impinge on our doxastic attitudes - only that they never impinge on our *rational* doxastic attitudes. So we may believe a proposition out of wishful thinking, for instance, but this would not be a rationally (or properly) held belief (for the proponent of rE).

A salient difference between the two principles is that the former, j(E), contains the bracketing function whereas the latter, rE, does not. The upshot of this is that the first principle allows for non-evidentialist reasons for belief, i.e. that non-evidentialist considerations may be rational from a moral or prudential point of view, for example (but not an epistemic point of view), whereas the second stipulates that only beliefs borne out of evidential considerations can ever be rational. However, there are further permutations available if we apply and dis-apply the bracketing function to the respective principles. Thus we can have a principle that stipulates that beliefs can only be justified if they are supported by evidence, from no matter which perspective:

jE: For any person S, time t, and proposition p, if S has any doxastic attitude at all toward p, then S ought to have the attitude toward p supported by S's evidence at t.

We can also have a principle that links believing in accord with evidence to believing rationally, but only from an epistemic perspective:

r(E): *Epistemically speaking*, if a subject S takes a rational doxastic attitude towards a proposition p at time t, then S (by definition) can but have taken the doxastic attitude that S's evidence at t suggested (including believing, disbelieving, and withholding belief). Only evidentialist considerations determine the rationality of belief (or of doxastic attitudes in general)<sup>56</sup>.

It may be questioned whether jE and rE, bracketed or not, are in fact independent, stand alone, principles. After all, evidentialism is usually associated with internalism, and the internalist is not going to be very happy about unhinging justification from rationality, for, they no doubt will ask, how can you have a justified belief that is not at the same time a rational one? For the externalist this option may be more palatable. However, we do not need to take a stand on the internalism/externalism debate here. It will suffice to point out, for now, that no principle of evidentialism need rule out the possibility that the considerations relevant to attributing rationality may differ from those relevant to attributing justification (even though rationality is a necessary condition for justification and vice versa). As Feldman himself puts it, "believing can be

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<sup>56</sup> One may here complain that if the rationality of belief is treated as a matter of epistemic rationality, then perhaps the difference between rE and r(E) does not really amount to much. There is nonetheless a difference in that for rE the rationality of belief must *always* be treated as a matter of epistemic rationality, where r(E) denies this (i.e. it allows for the rationality of belief to be determined by other means) although epistemically speaking, the rationality of belief is always a question of epistemic rationality – the last claim is not trivial in that it allows for the situation in parentheses above).

rational, then, but less than fully justified, in the sense that is an important necessary condition for knowledge" (Feldman 2004, p. 223)<sup>57</sup>. Thus we can be evidentialists about justification without being evidentialists about rationality, and, it seems, we can be evidentialists about rationality without being evidentialists about justification<sup>58</sup> even though one never goes without the other.

In the remainder of this chapter I consider two problems with evidentialism, namely the threshold problem and the availability problem. I will argue that these problems can be circumvented if we take Feldman's principle of evidentialism, or what I'm calling  $j(E)$ , i.e. that these problems only get Adler's principle (or  $rE$ ),  $rE$  and  $jE$  into trouble. Thus it would seem that  $j(E)$  is the more defensible principle. However, I then also consider the arguments to motivate  $jE$  and  $rE$  (with or without brackets). I argue that the arguments in favour of  $rE$  do not go through. This I will suggest is a penetrating problem for the hitherto unscathed  $j(E)$  because, as I shall argue, the argument for  $j(E)$  depends upon principle  $rE$ .

### 7.3 The Threshold Problem

Evidentialism is often accused of leaving the concept of "evidence" drastically ill explained (Pollock 1995; Owens 2000; Foley 1993). For it is not enough for a subject to believe a proposition according to *some* evidence, he must

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<sup>57</sup> Elsewhere, however, Feldman acknowledges that something like  $j(E)$  does imply  $rE$  (Feldman 2000, p. 685). I will argue that Feldman is right here (i.e. in Feldman 2000, not in Feldman 2004), but that this implication is seriously problematic for "evidentialism".

<sup>58</sup> Alvin Plantinga is an example of someone who holds this combination: "it is indeed true that we always or nearly always form beliefs upon the basis of evidence (at least where there is no cognitive pathology). But of course no amount of evidence of this sort is itself sufficient for warrant." (Plantinga 1993, p. 192).

believe it according to *sufficient* evidence. Similarly a subject must withhold belief in a proposition where there is *insufficient* evidence, disbelieve a proposition where there is sufficient evidence *against* it. The problem is how to determine when the threshold between some evidence and sufficient evidence is crossed. This is a problem familiar to philosophers of science who are confronted with the question of precisely how much evidence is necessary for a theory to be confirmed. Their answer has ranged from hypothetico-deductive models to models based more on probability theory<sup>59</sup>. In fact, the issue of how much evidence is necessary to properly confirm a hypothesis is a standing problem for induction generally. However, the claim made here against evidentialism is not that determining the threshold of what constitutes sufficient and insufficient evidence is a task incapable of being achieved; the claim is, rather, that the *evidentialist* is unable to do so. This is because evidential considerations *by themselves* cannot fix the level of evidence that is sufficient or insufficient for belief – there would be something circular about such an undertaking. We cannot answer questions about how much evidence is required for belief in a certain proposition with recourse to considerations about evidence alone. The situation is further compounded when we note that we don't just need to know *how* much evidence is sufficient, we also need to know whether or not it is *relevant* evidence. For instance, I may consider x, y and z as evidence for my belief that p, but it may not be the case that x, y and z in fact support p. (DeRose 2000). So the

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<sup>59</sup> For more on this see Achinstein 1983.

evidentialist also owes us an explanation regarding when a piece of evidence counts as a piece of evidence for or against a given proposition. Again, the claim is not that determining what evidence is relevant is impossible, it is that it would be question-begging to provide this explanation using evidential considerations *alone*. Further, it is not a satisfactory response to claim that the correct measure of what constitutes sufficient and relevant evidence for a given proposition is that it *guarantees* the truth of that proposition. It is not satisfactory because it is far too stringent a demand to make, making it very difficult indeed for us to believe much at all, and rules out most of the beliefs we have from being either rational or justified.

I think that the bracketing function can partly solve this problem for the evidentialist. Without the bracketing function the evidentialist claim is that non-evidential considerations can play no part in determining whether a subject is justified or rational. As we have seen this causes problems to the evidentialist because we need non-evidential considerations to determine the threshold of when some evidence becomes sufficient evidence. Surely we need some non-evidential considerations to determine this threshold. Using the bracketing function enables the evidentialist to allow non-evidential considerations to have a bearing on whether we attribute justification or rationality to a subject having a belief. Thus non-evidential considerations can be considered legitimate means to determine the elusive evidential threshold.



However, according to the bracketing function, we must view these means as lying outside the epistemic domain – i.e. they cannot help to settle what is justified nor what is rational from an *epistemic* point of view. So unless we want to find out what the threshold of evidence is that determines when one is justified or rational from a non-epistemic (e.g. moral or prudential) point of view, then the use of the bracketing function solves little. However, it may make a difference if we separate the bracketed justification principle of evidentialism –  $j(E)$  – from the bracketed rationality principle –  $r(E)$ . If we take  $j(E)$  as a separate principle from  $r(E)$  then it enables us to say that although non-evidential considerations cannot have a role in determining whether a subject's believing that  $p$  is epistemically justified, they can indeed serve to determine the question of its rationality. So we can use non-evidential considerations to determine the evidential threshold, without excluding them from the domain of epistemic rationality, but still claim that they cannot determine whether or not epistemic justification is attained. The answer to what the evidential threshold is can be within the domain of epistemic rationality, but that answer by itself will not settle whether or not a subject is justified – only evidential considerations can settle the question of epistemic justification. Thus the bracketed justification principle of evidentialism  $j(E)$  can deal with the threshold problem, since broader (prudential, moral etc.) considerations about rationality can fix and frame the variable standards of justification.

The bracketed rationality principle of evidentialism  $r(E)$ , however, cannot deal with this problem. This is because if we reverse the situation and have  $r(E)$  without  $j(E)$ , we get a situation where although non-evidential considerations may settle questions about epistemic justification, they cannot settle questions about epistemic rationality. This entails that one may attribute (using non-evidential considerations) epistemic justification to a subject believing that  $p$ , whilst not at the same time attributing them epistemic rationality. This seems highly counter-intuitive, or at least, counter-intuitive to an internalist, since they will want to keep a connection between believing justifiably and believing rationally (in accordance with the nature of belief). Of course, severing this connection won't seem so bad to an externalist. However, though I don't want to settle this problem by settling the debate between internalism and externalism, I think it suffices to say that if we need to appeal to externalism for support of  $r(E)$ , then the evidentialist has conceded somewhat, given the obvious discrepancy between evidentialism and externalism. But doesn't the internalist deny that we can have epistemic rationality without epistemic justification? I don't think she necessarily needs to. Internalism stipulates that (depending on what sort of internalism) the subject be either aware of what is justifying their belief or that what is justifying a subject's belief be determinable by reflection alone. Being epistemically justified without being epistemically rational entails that a subject may be justified in believing that  $p$  without awareness of their epistemic justifier, or that a subject is justified in believing that  $p$  in a way other via reflection – and

both such scenarios are in breach of internalism. For how could one have epistemic access to one's justifier, or determine via reflection alone whether one is justified, if one is not believing in a rational way (i.e. against the nature of belief)? Being epistemically rational and not epistemically justified does not violate this internalist principle because it does not preclude any special access to, or awareness of, one's epistemic justifier. One could well be believing rationally and be *aware* that such rational believing is not sufficient for believing with justification with regard to a particular proposition. Thus the bracketed justification principle of evidentialism  $j(E)$  is the *only* principle of evidentialism that can deal with the threshold problem. Simply put, this is because though there can be (consistently with internalism) epistemic rationality without epistemic justification, there cannot be epistemic justification without epistemic rationality. One cannot, thus, determine whether one is justified (using non-evidentialist considerations) without also, at once, determining whether one is epistemically rational. So the strategy of divorcing  $j(E)$  from  $r(E)$  is not available to  $r(E)$  - the independence only goes one way.

#### 7. 4 *The Availability Problem*

Another problem associated with evidentialism arises when we ask the question: how do evidential considerations (by themselves) settle when we are to consider evidence as *available* evidence? David Owens illustrates this point with

the following example<sup>60</sup>: imagine that I am wondering whether or not I should buy a house at a particular moment in time. I will buy the house only if I think that it is, economically speaking, a good time to buy one. I thus do some research on the matter and come to believe that it is not a good time to buy a house, so I plan to spend my money on an expensive holiday instead. However, just before I come to believe that it is not a good time to buy a house, an article appears in a newspaper, written by a respected economist, in which argues persuasively that it is, in fact, a good time to buy one. Unfortunately I don't have time to read the article and so do not change my mind about the state of the current housing market. It seems fine for me not to bother reading the article as I'm not an estate agent, or the like; my other practical needs trump the need to read the article (Owens 2000, p. 26).

The point of this and similar examples is to show how evidential considerations alone cannot determine what we should be interested in. How much evidence I seek regarding the housing market is merely a reflection of how important I regard the raising of interest rates vis-à-vis my other practical concerns. Importantly, what I am interested in drastically affects what evidence becomes *available* to me. Further, these non-evidential considerations affect not solely whether or not it is justified *for me* to conduct further enquiry into the housing market, they affect the *results* of my present enquiry. As Owens puts it:

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<sup>60</sup> Feldman (Feldman 2000) also cites Keith DeRose as having made this objection during conversation.

"I don't just decide to ignore the economist's article, I make up my mind about whether house prices will rise without considering it" (Owens 2000, p. 27).

One, unsuccessful, reply may be to limit the evidence that is up for scrutiny to evidence that a subject already possesses at a particular time. Whatever the evidence suggests, regarding a given proposition one has at a particular time, should determine one's doxastic attitude. Recall Richard Feldman's formulation of evidentialism:

j(E): For any person S, time t, and proposition p, if S has any doxastic attitude at all toward p at t and S's evidence at t supports p, then S epistemically ought to have the attitude toward p supported by S's evidence at t. (Feldman 2000, p. 679)<sup>61</sup>

Notice the phrases "time t" and "if S has any doxastic attitude at all toward p at t". Feldman thus restricts the evidence that is relevant to determining whether or not a subject ought to believe in a proposition to the evidence a subject already has regarding their attitude (if there is one) towards a given proposition. Evidence one could have had but did not (for instance, the information in the economist's article) is not considered relevant, even though it may be available. This reply won't do for two reasons. Firstly, it does not answer the charge that non-epistemic considerations are determining not just whether it is justified for a subject to conduct further enquiry, but also the result (i.e. what doxastic attitude the subject will take) of the enquiry. This is simply because what evidence S has at t will clearly make a difference to what S's doxastic attitude at t ought to be –

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<sup>61</sup> We perhaps ought to add that if S's evidence at t does not support p, then S ought to withhold judgement on p.

and what evidence S has at t is a result (or can be a result) of what S's non-evidential commitments happen to be. So non-evidential considerations can continue to play a role in determining what S ought to (or ought not to) be believing.

Secondly, to limit the evidence S has at t to the evidence that is up for scrutiny has the following unpleasant result: imagine that a member of some extreme right-wing organisation has been subject, under some sort of limited duress, to selected (and perhaps biased) pieces of information that allegedly support one of the organisation's misguided beliefs (that unemployed people sponge off the state, for example). Care has also been taken to ensure that this member does not have access to appropriate pieces of counter-evidence. In this case, under j(E), given what evidence they have, the member *ought* to share the organisation's misguided belief. This just seems counter-intuitive. Further, according to j(E), a subject could cut themselves off from as much evidence as they could or even any evidence at all - "if a person finds a drug or a machine that can erase memories from his brain and arranges to be immersed in a sensory deprivation tank" (Feldman 2000, p. 690) - and still have a highly rational doxastic attitude by believing nothing. Again, this seems highly counter-intuitive.

What all these considerations really show is the need for the bracketing function. If we use the bracketing function in our evidential principles then we can, without contradicting ourselves, bite the bullet and concede that whilst it is

the case that non-evidential considerations can have a bearing on what a subject's doxastic attitude ought to be, they do not have a bearing *epistemically*. Thus, from an *epistemic* point of view the budding fascist and the evidence recluse have the doxastic attitude they ought to have. What is wrong with their attitudes is a matter regarding moral or prudential consideration. It may be immoral to believe the things fascists say, or imprudent to believe nothing, but there is nothing wrong *epistemically* with these doxastic attitudes given the evidence the subjects hold. What matters epistemologically is a synchronic affair – what S's doxastic attitude ought to be *now* – not a diachronic (over time) issue, the proper concern of moral or prudential issues (Feldman 2000, p. 689)<sup>62</sup>. Bracketing the evidentialist principles can consistently deal with this issue in this way. This is because here we are allowing for non-evidential considerations to impinge on whether a belief is rational (albeit not from an epistemological point of view), precisely what non bracketed principles claim cannot be done.

However, I think there is more to this problem. Suppose that there allegedly exists a paper that persuasively contradicts everything I've been saying in this thesis. Unfortunately, it can only be accessed by visiting a remote and secluded library in the Sudan. Do we consider the paper as evidence *available* to me? We may do if I happen to be half Sudanese and visit Sudan regularly. We may not if I am a pauper living in England with no chance of buying a plane ticket to go there. The problem is that evidential considerations alone are not

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<sup>62</sup> See, however, how making the truth goal a synchronic aim is problematic in Chapter 6.3 of this thesis.

capable of answering this question. Non-evidential considerations, whatever they may be, need to be brought to the fore. Moreover, these non-evidential considerations cannot be dismissed as being non-epistemic, given that they seriously affect the result of enquiry - whether or not I visit the library in the Sudan may well determine the outcome of my belief-forming. That we need to somehow take on board these non-evidential considerations within the epistemic domain may, once again, motivate us to take one of the bracketed evidential principles independently from the other. Non-epistemic (e.g. practical) considerations may well be relevant in determining whether my belief is *rational* - they may determine whether or not evidence is available - but, in so doing, they do not *determine* whether I am justified in holding that belief. However, the reverse cannot be the case, such non-epistemic reasons cannot determine whether or not my belief is justified without *also* determining whether or not it is rational. The issue is almost identical to the threshold problem<sup>63</sup>. There, in order

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<sup>63</sup> There are related problems to the threshold and availability problem that can be treated the same way, consider this one raised by Ralph Wedgewood (Wedgewood 2002). His problem is that evidential considerations alone do not answer the question of *how much* better it is to believe that *p* when *p* is true, than just suspending judgement about *p*. Or *how much* better it is to suspend judgement about *p* than to believe that *p* when *p* is false,

but different answers to these questions have dramatically different implications about when one should believe *p* and when one should suspend judgement about *p*. If suspending judgement about *p* is much better than believing *p* when *p* is false, but not much worse than believing *p* when *p* is true, then presumably the rational attitude is to suspend judgement unless the evidence for *p* is very strong. On the other hand, if suspending judgement about *p* is much worse than believing *p* when *p* is true, but not much better than believing *p* when *p* is false, then presumably the rational attitude is to take one's chances and believe *p* when *p* is false, then presumably the rational attitude is to take one's chances and believe *p* even if the evidence for *p* is relatively weak. (Wedgewood 2002, p. 248)

Further, there may be times where evidence itself can give you reason *not* to believe a proposition. This is because belief can itself create evidence, and there at times when it does so that affects what reasons you



to secure an evidential threshold, we appealed to *rational* non-evidential considerations, thereby violating  $r(E)$  – and, incidentally,  $rE$ . Principle  $j(E)$  remained intact because it is not implausible (and not inconsistent with internalism) to hold someone epistemically rational but not epistemically justified, whereas it is implausible (or, at least, inconsistent with internalism) to hold someone epistemically justified but not rational, and this was what principle  $r(E)$ , without principle  $j(E)$ , entailed. So once again we can appeal to rational, non-evidential, considerations to grant us some criteria for when evidence is to be considered available – and thereby reject principle  $r(E)$  – while principle  $j(E)$  remains intact, i.e. the result of the availability question does not *settle* the justification question, only evidential considerations can settle it. Principle  $j(E)$  can stand alone as a principle where  $r(E)$  cannot for the very same reasons as above, namely, it is, at least, consistent with some form of internalism.

### 7.5 Motivating the Rationality Principle

So far I've been arguing that (a) only the justification principle of evidentialism  $j(E)$  can endure some of the most prominent criticisms made

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have for believing a proposition. Consider this example from Richard Foley (Foley 1991). I know that I am going to pass my exam if, and only if, I pass the exam. At the moment I am undecided on the issue, but I do have evidence (e) that I will pass the exam (I've done pretty well in my mocks, for example), so if I took the time to think about it, I would come to believe that I would pass the exam. However, my teachers, in an attempt to teach me some humility, decide to make it the case that I will only pass if I believe that I will not pass the exam. So if I believe that I do, they will make the exam so difficult for me that I will fail. Further, I know they are going to do this, and I have now thought about (e). It seems that I am in a bind here, for what should I believe? I cannot believe what I've got good evidence (e) for without somehow undermining that very belief (and under  $rE$ , believe *irrationally*), but to withhold belief is to go in the face of good evidence. Once again, evidential considerations alone cannot determine what I ought to believe.

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against evidentialism and that (b) it seems that although principle  $j(E)$  is independent from the rationality principle of evidentialism  $r(E)$ , the reverse is not the case, i.e.  $r(E)$  is not independent from  $j(E)$ . I now further my case against the rationality principle of evidentialism by arguing against the arguments designed to motivate it. However, in the section which follows, in considering the arguments designed to motivate the justification principle of evidentialism, I will argue that in fact these arguments for  $j(E)$  depend on the principle  $r(E)$ .

One way to motivate the rationality principle is broached by Jane Heal (Heal 1990). Hers is a psychological point: when we deliberate about what doxastic attitude we should hold in relation to  $p$ , we are in fact just deliberating about whether  $p$  is the case. If you ask yourself whether the sun sets in the east, you ponder whether evidence supports this – look at where the sun sets in relation to your compass – you do not consider whether it would be practical or ethical for the sun to set in the east. This psychological fact purportedly gives us motivation for accepting  $r(E)$ , what we *do* when we consider what doxastic attitude to take towards a proposition is consider what the evidence suggests. There are some flaws, however, with this way of motivating  $r(E)$ . To begin with, it is not obviously the case that all doxastic attitudes are, as a matter of empirical fact, considered with regard to evidence. Religious people, for example, may consider whether they ought to believe in God with regard to ethical (and not evidential) reasons. For example, a theological dictum exists that says “*Lex orandi*

*est lex credenti*" – "the rule for praying is the rule for believing"<sup>64</sup>. Further, consider the following example, which I've borrowed from Christopher Hookway (Hookway 2000, p. 151): beginners reading Descartes' first meditation for the first time often find no fault with Descartes sceptical conclusions, yet at the same time find themselves unable to genuinely suspend judgement over those propositions under question. This scenario suggests that here people are consistently believing contrary to what the epistemic optimum prescribes, and that they may be believing what they do for non-epistemic reasons, for instance, it might be impracticable for them to negotiate with the world if they believe they are continually being conned by an evil genius. One may reply that *as a matter of fact* these people are not believing for practical reasons but are in fact believing in accord with the evidence presented to them, which is in conflict with Descartes' considerations, and thus the example is consistent with principle rE. The problem here seems to be that of establishing this purported psychological matter of fact. However, given that such a fact has not been empirically established, it is enough to show that our intuitions can go in either direction (with regard to the question whether we always believe only with an eye to evidence) to put into question this type of evidentialist motivation.

In any case, even if it were a psychological fact that normally when we consider what doxastic attitude to take towards a proposition we consider what the evidence suggests, it does not show that this is the way we *ought* to believe.

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<sup>64</sup> See Boyd (1985)

Recognising this flaw, Jonathan Adler attempts to draw a similar conclusion from an argument that does not commit the naturalistic fallacy. He says that it is not a psychological fact that links belief to evidence, but, rather, a conceptual or logical link. He argues that believing without considering the evidence one has is incoherent, equivalent to the incoherence underlying Moore's paradox – *p*, but I do not believe that *p*. He asks us to consider this statement which he considers equivalent to a Moorean assertion:

The number of stars is even, but I lack sufficient evidence that the number of stars is even. (Adler 1999, p. 271)

Which he claims cashes out as:

I believe that the number of stars is even. All that can secure for me the belief's claim of truth is adequate evidence (reason) of its truth. I obviously lack adequate evidence. I cannot judge it true that the number of stars is even. So I cannot believe it. So I do not believe it. So I do not believe that the number of stars is even. (Adler 1999, p.271)

For Adler the incoherence comes from an explicit contradiction between the opening and closing statements. I think this strategy is problematic. To get to the conclusion that:

I do not believe that the number of stars is even,

we need the premise:

that all that can secure for me the belief's claim of truth is adequate evidence (reason) of its truth.

However, this premise is exactly what is under question here, since the non-evidentialist would deny that all that can secure for me the beliefs claim of truth is adequate evidence for it. An opponent may want to claim precisely that we can

believe (judge that a proposition is true) for moral reasons, for example. So the assertion that "the number of stars is even, but I lack sufficient evidence that the number of stars is even" does not amount to a Moorean contradiction, unless we insert a question begging premise. So Adler's strategy cannot confer independent motivation for adopting the rationality principle. Thus, not only does the rationality principle fail to dispatch the familiar arguments against evidentialism, it also cannot be, for all that has been shown here, reasonably motivated. It seems that we cannot rule out, on the basis of Adler's argument, that non-evidential considerations can sometimes fix the rationality of belief.

#### *7.6 Motivating the Justification Principle*

Richard Feldman (Feldman 2000) puts forward an argument in order to motivate the justification principle of evidentialism - j(E) - that consists in claiming that following the tenets of evidentialism is the best way to bring about what is of epistemic value, which he characterises as follows:

When adopting (or maintaining) an attitude toward a proposition, p, a person maximises epistemic value by adopting (or maintaining) a rational attitude toward p. (Feldman 2000, p. 685)

The best way of achieving what is of epistemic value, argues Feldman, is to follow one's evidence.

I think there are two points to consider regarding this argument. Firstly, it is only an argument for a bracketed principle of evidentialism. That following one's evidence is the best way of getting beliefs that have *epistemic* value is not going to show that non-evidential considerations cannot ever impinge on the

rationality, or justification, of a belief – all it shows is that non-evidential considerations for belief are not rational, or not justified, if the aim of the believer is to attain beliefs that are epistemically valuable, but they may well be rational, or justified, if the believer aims to attain beliefs that are, say, ethically valuable. Secondly, as Feldman infers, following one's evidence cannot be the best way to attain epistemic value, if epistemic value is conceived as having beliefs that are true and avoiding beliefs that are false – for one may believe a proposition based on strong evidence that is in fact false.

We avoid the problems associated with identifying epistemic value with true belief or with knowledge if instead we say that what has epistemic value are rational beliefs. (Feldman 2000, p. 685)

Thus, if we are to be evidentialists, we must hold that what is of epistemic value is rational belief.

This last step is important. Here is the rub. The argument for  $j(E)$  depends on the rationality principle of evidentialism (either  $rE$  or  $r(E)$ ). Feldman's argument consists in the claim that "to achieve epistemic value one must, in each case, follow one's evidence" (Feldman 2000, p. 685). However, the claim that non-evidential considerations can determine the rationality of belief surely vitiates the contention that only evidential considerations can determine what has epistemic value, since epistemic value is being defined as rational belief. So if rational belief is what is of epistemic value, and non-evidential considerations can determine whether a belief is rational or not, then it follows that non-

evidential considerations can bring about what is of epistemic value. Thus without holding that non-evidential considerations are irrelevant to the fixation of rational belief, as the rationalist principle of evidentialism claims, then this argument for  $j(E)$  does not get off the ground. The argument for  $j(E)$  is dependent on the rationality principle of evidentialism. However, as I have shown, the rationality principle is not without serious problems.

### *7.7 Concluding Remarks*

I'm sure I've succeeded in demonstrating that evidentialism is an elusive doctrine. I also hope to have succeeded in demonstrating the following: (a) that only an independent, bracketed justification principle of evidentialism can deal with the problems levied against general evidentialism, that; (b) the rationality principle of evidentialism is not independent from the justification principle; (c) the rationality principle is hard to motivate; and finally that (d) the argument for the justification principle depends on the rationality principle. Evidentialism, I conclude, is a two-faced theory. It can show a palatable side of itself in order to escape some problems while concealing a different, less acceptable, side of itself. Yet, in the end, we must acknowledge that both sides belong to one theory, and meet it head on. But even if I am wrong about (d), there is another indicated in this chapter. This is that evidentialism about rationality (i.e. the view that there *cannot* be non-epistemic reasons for belief) seems to be the weak link for the theory of evidentialism, i.e. that the most plausible version of evidentialism (evidentialism about epistemic justification) would be vitiated *because of its*

entailing evidentialism about rationality. I hope this supports the view that there can be such things as non-epistemic reasons for belief. In the following chapter, I explore further reasons for rejecting the evidentialist claim and try to support the idea that there can be epistemic reasons for action. Once I have established the plausibility (at least) of these notions, I go on to show how they support (if not entail) the view about epistemic normativity that I sketched out at the end of Chapter 6.



## Chapter 8: On the Unity of Justification

### 8.1 Obligations and Mere Evaluations

In this chapter I now come to attempt to articulate this thesis' positive contribution. I will here add the caveat that, as with most positive contributions, the view I that am about to express is tentative, and I do not claim to have done anything like *establishing* it. That said, I do hope to show that the results of this thesis do seem to make the view, if not persuasive, at least plausible. I started this thesis by making, what I take to be, an important distinction concerning justification's being a normative concept. When we wonder about someone's being justified in committing an action or having a belief, we are wondering about how to appraise their belief or action. Saying that S is justified in believing that *p*, for example, is to grant some sort of positive appraisal to S's believing that *p*; to say that S is not justified in doing  $\psi$ , is to grant some sort of negative appraisal to S' doing  $\psi$ . And the question is: an appraisal of what sort? I think the most important consideration here concerns whether the appraisal expresses some sort of an obligation or not, i.e. when we appraise S, are we saying something about whether S has done (or believed<sup>65</sup>) what they were *obliged* to. Here is the home of the concept of "blameworthiness" and the principle that ought implies can. To say that justificatory appraisals are of this sort and, further, are made *from an epistemic point of view*, then we have something akin to

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<sup>65</sup> If believing is something radically different to action, which I will contest later.

the “deontological<sup>66</sup>” conception of epistemic justification. However, we may also make appraisals that do not involve our saying anything about whether the person who is appraised has done what they were obliged to – we may, for instance, appraise someone’s nose as ugly, without our holding them responsible (and thus not blameworthy) for doing so – I called such appraisals *merely evaluative* appraisals in Chapter 1. So one can make an evaluative appraisal without making a “deontological” one at the same time. Most of this thesis has been about seeing whether it makes any sense to talk about such things as deontological appraisals *from the epistemic point of view*. (Recall how William Alston thinks that appraisals from the epistemic point of view can only ever be merely evaluative, and thus that his criticisms only make sense if the distinction between deontological and evaluative appraisal holds). Chapter 6 ended with the worry for the deontologist about how they could possibly say that their appraisals were distinctively epistemic, and I suggested that the deontologist’s best answer was to take this criticism on board but show how the implications of doing so are not as counter-intuitive as may first appear.

Showing this is what I set out to do in this chapter. My view entails accepting the distinction between deontological and merely evaluative appraisal, and suggesting that there is a level of appraisals that include saying something about obligations and a merely evaluative level of appraisal, and that it is in the latter that *reasons* operate. The distinction is similar to one between what W.D.

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<sup>66</sup> Although, as I pointed out in Chapter 1, this term may be misleading.

Ross calls “prima facie duties” and “all things considered duties” or “duties proper” (Ross 1930). For Ross, to say that someone has done their prima facie duty, is not to have appraised them as having fulfilled what was obliged of them, since a stronger, better reason could have dictated that. Similarly for me, a reason *on its own* is always *pro tanto*<sup>67</sup>, that is, relative to a standard or norm (hence why we call such reasons “normative”). To say that someone has (or does not have) a reason for acting (or believing) is to evaluate that someone doing that action, in a positive (or negative) way according to certain norms or standards. That is how we further determine the sortal for which a particular merely evaluative appraisal belongs. For example, to appraise S’s believing that *p*, with reference to the aim of believing the truth and avoiding falsehoods, is, perhaps, to make an *epistemic* appraisal. Because such evaluations are relative to a standard, they can only ever be *hypothetical* imperatives<sup>68</sup>. Further, importantly, because obligations arise out of a network of different reasons, a reason *on its own* can never express more than a merely evaluative appraisal (and so can only ever determine a *prima facie* duty). Again, because obligations arise out of a network of different reasons, perhaps more importantly, it fails to make sense that the obligation that arises is particularly epistemic, or, indeed, particularly ethical, or aesthetic or whatever. So it is thus to be expected that a deontological conception is going to have problems with giving *epistemic* “deontological” appraisals.

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<sup>67</sup> I take this phrase from John Broome; see Broome 1999, 2004.

<sup>68</sup> I.e. imperatives only if we value the aim that the particular standard of appraisal alludes to. Is there an imperative to value the aim of truth? I’m not sure, see Stich 1990 for some persuasive arguments that it is not, but note that nothing in making this type of evaluations would determine that.

Some care needs to be made about the use of the term "reason" here. I do not mean to talk about what it is *rational* for us to do or believe, but what it is for someone to be *justified* in doing or believing something. It may turn out that what it is rational for me to do or believe, just is what is justified for me to do or believe, but I leave open the possibility that the two can diverge. Jonathan Dancy makes a distinction between what he calls, perhaps rather unhelpfully for the present purposes, *normative* reasons and *motivating* reasons. For Dancy, motivating reasons are those that "actually made a difference to how [someone] acted; they constitute the light in which he chose to do what he did", normative reasons, on the other hand, are those that "we try to cite in favour of an action, because they are the ones that should show that the action was sensible or right or whatever" (Dancy 2000, p. 2). Once again, to clarify, the sense of "reason" that is being used here is Dancy's *normative*, i.e. I do not mean the term to merely pick out those reasons in the light of which one actually chose to do what they did. This might be confusing, since reasons, on their own, for me are only ever merely *evaluative*. Take this as yet another example of a confusion that can arise out of the varied (and seldom consistent) use of the term 'normative'. For me, having a reason is 'normative', in the sense that it is action-guiding, but this is not to say that having a reason means having an obligation, in other words a reason on its own is not action-compelling.

The view that I'm countenancing involves the claim that there is an evaluative level of reasons, distinct from the level of obligation, and that different

sorts of reason (i.e. epistemic, moral, legal etc.) can operate with and against each other, within the "push and pull" of reasons, to determine what one's emergent obligation will be. This is just what I mean by a "network" of reasons, and because obligations arise out of a network, then it ceases to make sense to carry over the sortal term given for a reason, over to the level of obligation - i.e. there are no different sorts of obligation, no distinctively *epistemic* obligations, no distinctively *legal* obligations, no distinctively *moral* obligations and so on. Of course, the view is not without many complications. For example, one may wonder how exactly different sorts of reasons can commensurate with one another to determine an obligation. I will try my best to sketch out some answers to this sort of question at the end of this chapter. For now however, much of the tenability of this thesis rests on whether or not there can be such things as non-epistemic reasons for belief and epistemic reasons for action, since an opponent might well complain that action and belief are different domains which, of their nature, require different sorts of appraisal. As regards belief, the opponent might claim, only epistemic appraisal is relevant because there can be no non-epistemic reasons for belief, whereas with regard to action, epistemic reasons are irrelevant in determining what one is obliged to do<sup>69</sup>. I hope to have done something to dissuade the proponent of the idea that there can be no non-epistemic reasons for belief in Chapter 7. What is at issue here is whether the *object* of appraisal (i.e.

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<sup>69</sup> It must be noted that this consideration does not do any damage to the claim that with regard to action, the different sorts of reason that are relevant for its evaluation e.g. practical, legal, moral, can all contribute to the emerging obligation.

belief) is enough to delineate a reason as 'epistemic'. If we can delineate what counts as epistemic solely with reference to the relevant standards of appraisal, then we can coherently hold that there can be such things as epistemic reasons for action and non-epistemic reasons for belief. I will now, then, evaluate some arguments (made mainly by Mills 1998) for the claim that epistemic appraisal is relevant only to evaluating beliefs. I will conclude that they are unsuccessful.

## 8.2 *The Divergence Thesis*

It is not uncommon to hold that whatever it is that may render a subject justified in believing that *p* (*from an epistemic point of view*) is not the same as that which renders a subject justified in believing that *p* (*from an ethical point of view*) – being epistemically justified in believing that *p* does not entail being morally justified in believing that *p* and vice versa. As Earl Conee puts it:

Epistemic support for a proposition indicates that it is true; prudential reasons for believing a proposition are indications that believing it would be prudent. In general, a proposition can be evidently true without being evidently prudent to believe. So epistemically justified propositions are not guaranteed to be prudent to believe. Similar considerations show that believing epistemically justified propositions need not be morally justified. (Conee 2004, p. 253)

If this is the case, moral and epistemic justification can not only come apart but can also come into conflict. It does not seem intuitively incoherent to hold, for instance, that while Patient Smith was morally justified in believing his illness was not terminal, he was not epistemically justified in believing it given the overwhelming evidence against it. Nor does it seem incoherent to hold, to use a more familiar example, that Wife Jones is morally justified in believing her

husband innocent of perfidy (given her vows of allegiance, perhaps) whilst being epistemically unjustified for having such a belief considering the weighty evidence against it. Aside from such intuitive support for the "divergence thesis"<sup>70</sup> – i.e. the idea that moral and epistemic justification can come apart – there is also a more theoretical basis on which to build the thesis. This consists of the claim that the way to distinguish between epistemic and ethical justification is by appeal to the standards over which their objects are appraised. For epistemic justification the standard for appraisal is its link to "truth", for moral justification its link with "the right" or "the good"<sup>71</sup>. An epistemic appraisal is *epistemic* when one judges with authoritative reference to the truth, an ethical appraisal is *ethical* when one judges with authoritative reference to the right or the good. If this is the correct way to distinguish between ethical and epistemic justification, then the truth of the divergence thesis follows, for there is nothing to prevent actions from being appraised by application of the standards of epistemology and nothing to prevent beliefs being appraised by application of the standards of ethics. It could be objected that one can only set things up in this way if one makes the substantive assumption that beliefs can be considered actions. I'll consider this assumption in a moment, but for now consider that the divergence thesis, if true, raises an issue of "normative incommensurability"<sup>72</sup>. If both actions and beliefs can be evaluated from each of the ethical and epistemic

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<sup>70</sup> I borrow this term from Eugene Mills (Mills 1998).

<sup>71</sup> Consequentialism vs. Deontology neutral.

<sup>72</sup> Again I borrow this term from Eugene Mills (Mills 1998), but he cites John Heil (Heil 1992) as having originally coined this phrase.

perspectives, then it is possible that two conflicting actions or two conflicting beliefs can both be justified depending on what perspective is taken. So what should one do or believe, whatever is ethically optimal or whatever is epistemically optimal? I don't think that this question can be answered if the divergence thesis is correct. However, like Eugene Mills (Mills 1998)<sup>73</sup> I reject the divergence thesis, but, unlike Mills, I do not do so by rejecting the possibility that one can identify epistemic reasons solely by their objects of appraisal, namely beliefs. I now move to discuss how Mills' arguments for this claim, and so against the divergence thesis, fail, with a view to making another attempt at a strategy to establish the unity of justification where justification is a deontological concept.

### 8.3.1 Non-Epistemic Reasons for Belief

A quick response to the divergence thesis mentioned, and dismissed "for charity's sake" (Mills 1998, p. 30), by Mills is to deny the assumption that beliefs can be considered actions. Moral justification pertains only to action, so if beliefs are not actions then they can be neither morally justified nor unjustified. Hence there is no divergence: it just does not make sense, for example, to attribute *moral* justification to Wife Jones' belief that her husband is innocent of adultery, she is either epistemically justified in believing what she does or she is not, there is no other option and so there is no tension. As Robert Audi puts is:

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<sup>73</sup> The divergence that Mills discusses, however, is between *practical* and epistemic justification. Nevertheless, I don't think much is lost in applying his strategy against divergence between practical and epistemic justification to the divergence between ethical and epistemic justification, *mutatis mutandis*.



If I have been right and neither believing nor forming beliefs is a case of action, then there is little or no place for an ethics of belief. (Audi 2001, p. 105)

However, not only does this strategy fail to address the intuition that there is a sense in which Wife Jones is justified in believing her husband innocent, it also relies on the assumption that moral justification pertains only to action. Presumably this assumption can be maintained by invoking the principle that ought implies can; this can only work, however, if it only makes sense to attribute ethical justification in a deontological (i.e. not merely evaluative) way. If moral justification is a merely evaluative concept then the use of the principle that ought implies can is redundant – one may judge something as good from an ethical point of view regardless of whether it was committed by an agent who could have done otherwise. So taking this line of argument against the divergence thesis commits one to the claim that one cannot make moral evaluations that are without deontological implications (i.e. implications pertaining to what one is obliged to do, and are blameworthy for not doing). I'm not sure this latter claim is correct, but I'll leave saying more about that until Section 5. In any case I think there is something question-begging about this line of argument against the divergence thesis. It begins with the claim that only actions can be the objects of moral deliberation, but that claim can make sense only if we think that the way to establish the difference between ethical and epistemic justification is via appeal to the objects of appraisal, i.e. belief and

action. However this is just what is under consideration here, for a proponent of the divergence thesis claims that the way to differentiate between ethical and epistemic justification is *not* by appeal to the *objects* of appraisal but by appeal to the *standards* of appraisal, i.e. truth and the good, and this is how to establish the divergence thesis.

Perhaps a more sophisticated strategy for arguing against the divergence thesis, which does not rely on the *mere* assumption that only actions can be the objects of moral justification, is to argue that reasons for belief (i.e. "the norms governing belief") can never be non-epistemic (and *thus* that moral justification cannot pertain to belief). This is the strategy taken by Mills. It begins with the consideration that we have, at best, *indirect* or *nonbasic* control over beliefs, i.e. that unmediated believing at will is, at least psychologically if not conceptually, impossible. Here again Mills cites John Heil:

Even if believing is not something one can sensibly set out to do *directly*, one is often in a position to take steps that will, predictably, *result* in the formation (or extinction) of beliefs. The same, of course, is true of my turning on the light in the study. Doing so requires my doing something else: moving my finger, say, thereby flipping the switch and initiating a process that culminates in the light's going on. Just so, I can scrutinize or ignore evidence bearing on some hypothesis I am entertaining. (Heil 1992, p. 51)<sup>74</sup>

So although direct doxastic voluntarism is false, because we can control what we believe indirectly, it can still make sense to employ the vocabulary of action when talking about beliefs in the same way it makes sense to use the vocabulary

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<sup>74</sup> As cited in Mills 1998, p. 32.

of action when talking about things like turning on lights. If we can use the vocabulary of action about beliefs, then there is nothing preventing a belief being justified from an ethical but not an epistemic point of view, i.e. the divergence thesis has not yet been vitiated by appeal to doxastic involuntarism.

We may now wonder, however, whether mediated control over belief is really analogous to mediated control over action. It is arguable, Mills remarks<sup>75</sup>, that flipping a switch in a way that turns on a light, just *is* turning on a light, so if I know that flipping the switch turns on the light, then I am justified in flipping the switch just in case I am justified in turning on the light, since the two are the same action. This is fair enough with regard to action but, asks Mills, imagine a case regarding belief. Can it be the case that acceptance of a belief that *p* that is epistemically *unjustified* for *S*, be ethically *justified*? Only if *S*'s accepting that *p* is the same thing as *S*'s bringing it about that *S* believes that *p*, in the same way that flicking the switch is the same thing as turning on the light, and Mills argues, this it not the case. It may be the case that *S* can voluntarily subject themselves to some procedure, such as intentional abnegation or brainwashing, that will successfully bring it about that *S* believes that *p*. However, "such subjection cannot, by itself, plausibly count as accepting [that *p*]" (Mills 1998, p. 34), since *S* will not believe that *p* until *after* the procedure is complete. If *S* can continue to disbelieve or withhold judgement that *p* during even some of the procedure, then

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<sup>75</sup> Here Mills cites Davidson 1963.

undergoing such a procedure is not constitutive of believing that *p* in the same way that flicking on a switch is constitutive of turning on a light.

Thus it does not follow that if one is ethically justified in undergoing some belief altering procedure, one will also be ethically justified in believing the ensuing belief. What is needed to make this inference follow, argues Mills, is some "justification transference principle", such as:

JT     If *S* is [ethically] justified in doing things that will predictably in result in her accepting that *p*, then *S* is [ethically] justified in accepting that *p*. (Mills 1998, p. 35)

However, JT is false. For example, I've been captured by some terrorists who for some reason or another give me two choices: either be brainwashed into accepting their (false) extremist beliefs, or have my family brutally butchered. In this scenario, I think it is fair to say that there is nothing counter-intuitive in saying that I am ethically justified (or at the very least, not culpable) in deciding to undergo the brainwashing. But being morally justified in undergoing the brainwashing does not entail that I will be morally justified in believing those ensuing extremist beliefs. Consider that it may be constitutive of having those beliefs that I commit horrible acts of terrorism, and as Mills puts it "it would be bizarre to say that I bear no culpability for the horrible murders I commit just because I became a monster for the best of reasons" (Mills 1998, p. 35)<sup>76</sup>. The absence of a justification transference principle tells against any appeal to *indirect*

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<sup>76</sup> My example here is not identical to that of Mills' as he's using an example which concerns practical and not ethical justification.

doxastic voluntarism to establish the divergence thesis. Why? Because being ethically justified in undergoing some belief-altering procedure does not *guarantee* being justified in accepting the ensuing belief, so mediated believing is relevantly unlike mediated action, such as turning on a light.

Nevertheless, although this consideration *tells against* the divergence thesis, I do not think it does enough to *refute* it. All it shows is that it does not *necessarily* follow that my being (un)justified in undergoing some belief altering procedure means I am (un)justified in accepting the ensuing belief. But all the divergence thesis needs is that it is *possible*, some of the time, that I am both justified in undertaking the procedure and justified in accepting the resultant belief. If it *can* be the case that I am justified in undergoing the procedure and for the same reasons am justified in believing the culminated belief, then the divergence thesis is home and dry. Now, Mills denies that I can be justified in believing that *p* for the same reasons that I am justified in undergoing a procedure that will bring it about that I believe that *p*. For suppose I was asked after I'd been brainwashed what my reasons were for believing that *p*: Mills conjectures that I would not cite ethical reasons for believing but (were the evidence telling against *p*) I would cite "bad evidential reasons" (Mills 1998, p. 36). I would answer, for instance, with reference to extremist religious texts which I would claim had some sort of epistemic authority, and even if it were pointed out to me that I had gone through some self-inflicted procedure to get myself to believe

what I now do, I would reply that I was glad I did, so that I could now see the *truth*. However, although Mills may be right in this conjecture, it must be noted that it does not follow from any lack of justification transference principle on the part of belief. The fact that it does not follow that the reasons for being justified in undergoing a belief-altering procedure, are the same as those that render my being justified in believing the resultant belief, does not rule out that sometimes *contingently* being the case. To establish the latter we need an extra argument.

### 8.3.2 Mills' Extra Argument and Epistemic Reasons for Action

For the divergence thesis to hold we need to be able to "have practical, non-epistemic reasons which would serve as [our] *reasons for withholding*" (Mills 1998, p. 38) or, indeed, not withholding, acceptance of the belief that *p*. Such reasons would be available, argues Mills, "if doxastic voluntarism were true" (Mills 1998, p. 38). So Mills' strategy turns to denying the possibility of doxastic voluntarism, specifically the *conceptual* possibility because "if doxastic voluntarism is only contingently false, then epistemic and practical [or ethical] justification *needn't* coincide, and there is no *necessary* unity of justification" (Mills 1998, p. 39). However, some care needs to be taken here as to what precisely is being argued. Mills is correct in claiming that if doxastic voluntarism were true, then non-epistemic reasons for belief would be available<sup>77</sup>. However,

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<sup>77</sup> I use the word "available" here and not "possible" because the issue here turns on whether non-epistemic reasons can motivate and thus "rationalise" belief, and this may not be the case even if non-epistemic reasons for belief exist in some abstract sense.

the impossibility of doxastic voluntarism would not by itself be enough to deny the possibility of believing for non-epistemic reasons. Doxastic involuntarism only claims that we cannot believe at will, it does not claim that we believe only epistemic reasons – it is consistent with involuntarism that we *always involuntarily* believe for ethical, practical or even aesthetic reasons. As it happens the argument that Mills uses to establish the impossibility of doxastic voluntarism can *also* serve as an argument against the availability of non-epistemic reasons for belief, but it would be a mistake to think that it does so *because* it is an argument for (conceptual or psychological) doxastic involuntarism.

Mills uses an argument by Dion Scott-Kakures (Scott-Kakures 1994) against the conceptual possibility of doxastic voluntarism which I mentioned in Chapter 2.4, and which as I say, doubles up as an argument against the availability of non-epistemic reasons for belief. To re-cap, the argument goes as follows: for a reason to *motivate* a belief it must be “monitored” by an intention which “sees the action through”. Say I want to believe that *p* at *t*, but that my evidence at *t* does not sanction the belief. I intend to believe that *p*, and may indeed be successful in bringing myself to believe that *p*, but it cannot be my *intention* that governs “as opposed to causing” (Mills 1998, p. 42) the formation of the belief that *p*, because:

...the beliefs which generate the intention are incompatible with my believing that *p*. Thus the intention must be abandoned before its satisfaction conditions are realized. If the intention that I formulate must be abandoned before I succeed in bringing about the state of affairs it represents, then that intention cannot be one by which I direct and monitor my activity until success. (Scott Kakures 1994, p. 96)

Thus doxastic voluntarism is false and non-epistemic reasons for belief cannot be available to a believer, for both rely on an intention which cannot be realised – intentions cannot “rationalize” belief, in the Davidsonian sense, in the way they can action. Now for this argument to be an argument against the *conceptual* possibility of doxastic voluntarism, Scott-Kakures has to maintain that when I form (at *t*) my intention in believing that *p*, in order for us to attribute my having an intention at all, I must also possess the belief “that my believing that *p* is not currently justified” (Scott-Kakures 1994, p. 94). However, as Dana Radcliffe (Radcliffe 1997) points out, this need not be the case, for not believing that the belief that *p* would be justified is not the same as believing that *p* is *not* justified – I may not have the higher-level belief that the belief that a particular television program is on at 19.00 is justified, as I am yet to look at the *Radio Times*, but this does not mean that I believe that the belief is *not* justified, i.e. it may turn out that the *Radio Times* *does* corroborate my belief, though, of course, it *may* not. All that is required for me to form the intention to believe that *p* is that I do not believe that the belief that *p* would be justified. So if, for instance, I want to believe that the TV programme is on at 19.00 (it would fit nicely in my schedule), my lacking an opinion as to what the epistemic status of the belief would be does not



mitigate my wanting to believe it, for there is no "cognitive fissure" between not being sure as to whether the belief would be justified and my intending to believe it as there is between my believing the belief would be unjustified and my intending to believe it. Thus, the argument does not establish the *conceptual* impossibility of doxastic voluntarism. Nor, incidentally, does it establish the unavailability of non-epistemic reasons for belief, for if intending to believe that *p* does not require *S* to believe that *S*'s believing that *p* is unjustified, then *S* may well intend, *for non-epistemic reasons*, to believe that *p*, and there is nothing preventing that intention from "rationalising", in Davidson's sense, the belief, for it no longer must be "abandoned before I succeed in bringing about the state of affairs it represents". So, for all Mills and Scott-Kakures show, doxastic voluntarism is conceptually possible and non-epistemic reasons for belief available. More importantly, for the purposes of this paper, the availability of non-epistemic reasons for belief means that the divergence thesis emerges from these considerations alive and well.

Further, we now have no motivated reason why we cannot distinguish epistemic appraisal with sole appeal to its relevant standards of appraisal. This not only means that not only can we have non-epistemic reasons for belief, it also means that we can have epistemic reasons for action – providing we appraise those actions by epistemic standards. So when someone asks me, for example, why I am reading William Alston's new book, I can coherently say that I am

doing so for epistemic reasons. And we need not take these reasons in Dancy's "motivational sense", but as action-guiding, since they may well emerge from a hypothetical imperative: if I want to know about the latest work being done in epistemology, then I really ought to read that book. They are also *epistemic* in that doing so may put me in a better position to attain the epistemic aim, viz. believe true propositions and avoid false ones. It may emerge that reading Alston's new book is my *duty proper*, i.e. that I am obliged to do so, but this will depend on whether or not there are other stronger reasons pulling me in a different direction as well as force of the reason I have for reading the book, pending situational constraints.

Now, one may complain that actions are related to the truth goal in the wrong sort of *way*. An evidentialist may claim that epistemic reasons can only ever – because they are truth indicators – pertain to propositions (namely the propositional objects of a belief state). As Conee puts it "what gets justified by the answer to the question – How do you know? – is the known proposition not believing it" (Conee 2004, p. 252)<sup>78</sup>. Further, they may claim, the truth goal can only ever be attained by synchronic means since "diachronic questions are moral or prudential questions rather than epistemic questions" (Feldman 2000, p. 689). However, as I showed in Chapter 6, there is reason to be skeptical about these claims.

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<sup>78</sup> See also Moser 1989.

Concerning the truth goal, the reductio argument showed that, at the very least, it is as problematic for the truth goal to be a synchronic aim as it is to be a diachronic aim. It is also unclear why an action could not satisfy the truth goal synchronically. Nevertheless, to be sure, actions cannot be either true or false, so if an epistemic reason is an indication of something's truth, then there cannot be non-epistemic reasons for action. However, again as we saw in Chapter 6, there is reason to be skeptical about the claim that *only* epistemic reasons are indications of something's truth. Cognitivists in ethics claim that moral judgements do have propositional content, and so, for example, my *belief* that it is wrong to lie, if moral, is true – but I do not thereby believe that it is wrong to lie for *epistemic* reasons. So moral reasons, for the cognitivists, are also an indication of the truth of something. Now, this does not show that, if epistemic reasons are simply indications of the truth of a proposition, that epistemic reasons can apply to action. It does, however, remove the appeal to cash out what an epistemic reason is in this way – namely, to distinguish epistemic reason from other sorts of reason, as cashing out what they are in this way does not so distinguish them. The best way to pick out what an epistemic reason is, is as one that has as its most basic aim the goal of maximising believing truth and minimising believing falsehood, and there is nothing in this that stipulates that only propositions (and not the believing of them) can get justified from the standpoint of this aim. So there can be epistemic reasons for action just as long as they can contribute to our

epistemic aim, and since clearly they can, there can be epistemic reasons for action.

#### 8.4 Haack on the "Ethics of Belief"

I propose then that we take a different strategy if we are going to displace the divergence thesis. In discussing the relationship between ethical and epistemic justification (she uses "appraisal") Susan Haack (Haack 2001) delineates the following alternatives:

- (i) That epistemic appraisal is a subspecies of ethical appraisal – the *special case thesis*.
  - [(i\*) Ethical appraisal is a subspecies of epistemic appraisal – *special cases thesis* \*.]
  - (ii) Positive/Negative epistemic appraisal is distinct from, but invariably associated with, positive/negative ethical appraisal – the *correlation thesis*.
  - (iii) There is, not invariable correlation, but partial overlap, where positive/negative epistemic appraisal is associated with positive/negative ethical appraisal – the *overlap thesis*.
  - (iv) That ethical appraisal is inapplicable where epistemological appraisal is relevant – the *independence thesis*.
  - (v) That epistemic appraisal is distinct from, but analogous to, ethical appraisal – the *analogy thesis*. (Haack 2001, p. 21)
- And
- (vi) That epistemic appraisal is identical to ethical appraisal – the *unity thesis*.

Haack does not discuss (i\*) because "with its Platonic overtones would require a paper of its own" (Haack 2001, p. 30) and dismisses (vi) as "too obviously false to consider" (Haack 2001, p. 30), but I now hope to show that a *version* of it is at least plausible<sup>79</sup>. It is here that I hope to show the importance of the

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<sup>79</sup> I will not, however, attempt to refute the other alternatives.

normative/evaluative/descriptive distinction. Roderick Chisholm (Chisholm 1991) is a proponent of the special case thesis (i), his argument goes as follows:

- (1) An *ethical* duty is one which is not superseded by any other duty or requirement.
- (2) When I am subject to a requirement that is not superseded by another, it is my *ethical* obligation to fulfill that requirement.
- (3) If I am subject to an epistemic requirement that is not superseded by another, that requirement becomes my absolute ethical duty.
- (4) Thus, ultimately, epistemic requirements are special cases of ethical requirement.

Or as he puts it:

The distinguishing feature of an *ethical* duty is not to be found in the considerations that impose on that duty. Rather, an ethical duty is simply a requirement that is not overridden by any other requirement. If I am subject to a requirement of etiquette - of Small Morals -and if nothing overrides this requirement, then doing what I am thus required to do is my *duty*, my "*absolute ethical duty*". So, too, for the requirements of aesthetics. And so, too, for epistemic requirements - the requirements of reasonable belief. (Chisholm 1991, p. 127)

However, as Haack comments, (4) cannot follow from (1), (2) and (3) for two reasons. Firstly, even if premises (1) - (3) were true, all that could be established is that "only *some* epistemic requirements - those that are not overridden by other requirements - are ethical" (Haack 2001, p. 23). Those epistemic requirements that *are* trumped by other requirements remain *epistemic* requirements, so not all epistemic requirements are ethical, so the special case thesis is not established vis-à-vis *all* epistemic requirements. Secondly, what exactly is distinctively *ethical* about a requirement that has not been "overridden"

by another requirement? It seems that Chisholm is guilty of re-defining the word “ethical” to fit his thesis, “that this is a re-definition becomes apparent when one considers that it implies, for example, that any requirement of prudence, say, or aesthetics, would be classified as ethical” (Haack 2001, p. 23). Further, surely, we want to continue to call a requirement “ethical” once another requirement has come along to override it, particularly if had we considered it “ethical” before the overriding took place. Otherwise what would we call such a trumped requirement?<sup>80</sup>

Having dismissed Chisholm’s case for the special-case thesis, Haack moves on to consider what she takes to be its nearest alternative, namely, the idea that epistemic justification is distinct from, but invariably associated with, ethical justification – the correlation thesis. Haack argues against the correlation thesis on the grounds that it is at least not intuitively incoherent to ascribe epistemic justification to *S*’s believing that *p* whilst not at the same time ascribing ethical justification – in other words, that divergence is more in accord with our intuitions than correlation. Her next option, the one she goes for, is to opt for the overlap thesis – that, though there is not inevitable correlation (so there *can* still be divergence), there is partial overlap between epistemic and ethical justification. In the absence of a position less strong than straight out correlation and less weak than independence, the overlap thesis now seems the more

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<sup>80</sup> We might say that it then ceases to be a *requirement*, but a non-action guiding norm or convention perhaps, but that would continue to fail to answer the question of what sort of a norm or convention it would be if not an ethical norm or convention.

sensible alternative. However, although I do not want directly to argue against the overlap thesis, I do think that it has a tenable rival.

That rival is the claim that epistemic justification (where deontological) is identical to ethical justification – i.e. a version of the unity thesis. Now, although it may seem that this is a stronger thesis than correlation, I hope to show that it is at least more palatable. I think it can be established with reference to a version of Chisholm's argument for the special case thesis, the fact that different sorts of reason can contribute in determining obligations (shown by the possibility of non-epistemic reasons for belief and epistemic reasons for action) and to the distinction between the level of obligations (deontological, "all things considered") and the level of giving reasons (evaluative, "prima facie"). Chisholm's description of what an ethical requirement consists of can serve as a description of what is an obligation, as opposed to a mere evaluation of a possible course of action<sup>81</sup>. A deontological requirement (or obligation) is one that is not overridden or superseded by another requirement. One be held blameworthy only for not fulfilling a deontological requirement. When we make a *merely evaluative* judgement on someone's cognitive status, we mean that the norms by which we are appraising may have been overridden by other requirements, the subject would not be blameworthy for failing to abide by those overridden norms (providing they have done all they can to fulfill the

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<sup>81</sup> Can it make sense to speak of a merely evaluative *requirement*? Probably not. So when I use the phrase "evaluative requirement" take me to mean something like a *quasi*-requirement, a norm that would be a requirement were it not trumped by another requirement.

overriding requirement). So if the concept of justification is a deontological concept (and a not merely evaluative one) in the way described above, we can now establish a sort of unity thesis. The problem with Chisholm's argument for the special case thesis is that it seemed to re-define what we mean by 'ethical', and that it failed to allow room for merely evaluative ethical judgements. We circumvent these problems, however, if we use his strategy as a way of establishing the unity thesis: when a requirement becomes obligatory in the deontological sense, it fails to make any sense to qualify the requirement with the prefixes "epistemic" requirement or "ethical" requirement; one's absolute duty is one's absolute duty *tout court*. This is because obligations emerge out of networks of differing sorts of reason, and even where a particular sort of reason has riding force over its (potential) alternatives, the emergent obligation does not carry over the sortal term the reason has as the obligation emerges because the other (albeit weaker) reasons were also relevant in determining it. Further, different sorts of reasons may prescribe the same action at *t*, thereby contributing to the force of the emergent obligation. So where justification is a deontological concept, epistemic and ethical justification are identical, never particularly epistemic, never particularly ethical or prudential. The divergence thesis does not hold at the level of obligations.

Of course, all this does not rule out the possibility of making merely evaluative judgments from either an epistemic or ethical (or whatever) point of view – to say that there is a reason for an action or belief is to say that it has been



positively evaluated to a certain respect relative to a certain standard or norm, it is to say that the reason is action-guiding, but not action-compelling. So we do not run afoul of Haack's complaint against the correlation thesis, that divergence between ethical and epistemic justification is intuitively coherent, for we are now trying to accommodate that intuition: there are times when epistemic and ethical appraisal come apart, sure, but that is only when we are making merely evaluative appraisals. This, I believe, is at home with our intuitions, for if a subject had a choice between either doing their epistemic (*prima facie*) duty or their moral (*prima facie*) duty at *t* (and one duty does not override the other), would we consider them blameworthy for failing to fulfill either one of their duties? I would suggest not. The unity thesis, thus construed, is weaker than the correlation thesis, in that it does not do away with divergence altogether, yet it is stronger than either the correlation or independence thesis in that it stipulates that *sometimes* - i.e. when we make appraisals concerning our obligations - epistemic and ethical appraisal are not distinct. So there is an alternative to the overly strong correlation thesis, and the weak independence thesis, that is not the overlap thesis. If the only motivation for adopting the overlap thesis is that it has no rival alternative, then there is no motivation for adopting it. This is not to deny, however, that where appraisal is merely evaluative, the overlap thesis is the only viable alternative.

#### 8.5. Conclusion – Normative Incommensurability

I have been trying to argue here that where justification is a deontological concept, the divergence thesis does not hold. I have called this the unity thesis. This, I think, is a way for the deontological conception of epistemic justification to take on board the criticism concerning its inability to say how deontological appraisals are distinctively epistemic. This way of doing it, it must be said, does not defend that epistemic justification is deontological because the evaluative level of giving reasons has remained intact. I think this is healthier form of "tolerant pluralism" than perhaps is Alston's. All I have done so far is show that the unity thesis is at least as tenable as Haack's overlap thesis, because it is tenable for the same reasons. I would like to end this chapter by making some suggestions as to why my version of the unity thesis is a preferable alternative. I think it is preferable because it is more promising in its ability of answering the charge of normative incommensurability. Without invoking the difference between deontological and evaluative appraisal, and from within the overlap thesis, what do we say a subject ought to do when they are in the presence of genuine divergence? Ought they to do what is epistemically right? Or what is ethically right? I don't think there can be an answer to this question from within these parameters. Maybe, we can answer it from a standpoint within the unity thesis, however: there is no problem of *deontological* incommensurability when merely evaluative epistemic and ethical justification come apart, for we are not here saying anything about what a subject *ought* to do, and at the deontological level, according to the unity thesis, there is no divergence, so no dilemma.

Nevertheless, one may wonder how it is possible for an ethical norm to “override” an epistemic one, or vice versa, if the two *can* diverge at the evaluative level. Further, I have left open exactly how obligations *emerge* from reasons, and how we might be able to know what our “duty proper” or obligation is. Again, unfortunately, I am going to have to concede these as genuine worries and have no firm solution to offer here. Nevertheless I do wonder whether ethical reasons and epistemic reasons do not in fact in some way commensurate when we consider what we are obliged to do (though not when we are fixated on doing what is right from one or another particular point of view) – one does not object that spending time at the library at the expense of the livelihood of one’s child is worthy of just reproach, for instance. Yet, it would be easy to object that spending time at the library is an *action* that is being evaluated against another from the point of view of *ethics*. But the waters are muddy here as it must be remembered that we only have indirect control over our beliefs and that it does not seem illegitimate to use the vocabulary of action to talk about belief, so it is not clear that here we are only talking about ethics. I suggest that this muddiness indicates that, really, there is no divergence at level of obligations, so although epistemic and ethical reasons can come apart, obligations cannot (for different sorts of reason can be relevant in determining what we are obliged to do) but I have, really, only managed to suggest this here. All the same, on this score I do think Eugene Mills is absolutely correct:

The falsity of the divergence thesis would console the intellect, for it would obviate the need for a solution to an apparent problem of normative incommensurability. It would offer little pragmatic consolation, however. For we may still find ourselves in situations in which our only justifiable option is to take steps which we justifiably believe will result in our having unjustified beliefs. This would usually be bad luck. It would not be as bad, though, as having *no* univocally justified option. (Mills 1998, p. 49)

Mills thinks that in the absence of a good argument for the divergence thesis we may be optimistic in thinking that a “univocally justified option” exists. The pragmatic consolation of the unity thesis, as I have presented it, might be its potential freeing us from the burden of having to be merely optimistic.

## *Conclusion*

This thesis has been a defence of what is known as the deontological conception of epistemic justification. In Chapter one, I raised some reservations as to whether some version of deontologism could not be compatible with a merely evaluative conception like William Alston's. However, because the topic of this thesis concerns whether or not we have epistemic *obligations* (and whether they can serve to ground our conception of epistemic justification), I have only discussed deontologism in a way that would not be compatible with a merely evaluative conception. My defence of deontologism has consisted in claiming that at the level of obligations there is a unity of justification. At this level, it makes no sense to say that justification is *epistemic, moral, legal, prudential*, or whatever, and so I have suggested that it is perhaps a little unfair on the deontologist to criticise him for leaving what it is that makes justification *epistemic* unexplained. This unity of justification follows if, I argued, there can be non-epistemic reasons for belief and epistemic reasons for action as well as there being a distinction between a merely evaluative and a deontological level of appraisal. If reasons, on their own, are only ever merely evaluative, and differing sorts of reasons (epistemic, moral, prudential etc.) can contribute towards ensuing obligations, then obligation can never be a purely epistemic affair any more than it can be a purely moral affair. However, strictly speaking, this cannot then be a defence of a deontological conception of *epistemic* justification, since at the deontological level, there is no particular epistemic domain. Nevertheless, because this picture allows for there being particularly epistemic reasons at the

merely evaluative level, and that such reasons can contribute in determining obligations, then this kind of defence does serve as a defence of epistemic deontology, since it does not entirely preclude an epistemic dimension. So it is a defence of epistemic deontology in an overall account of normativity.

Though I have given a sketch of what such an overall account may be, I have, by no means, fully defended it here. The account, no doubt, raises as many questions as it solves, for instance the issue of normative incommensurability raised at the end of Chapter 8. Nevertheless, I think that the issues that it does raise are issues that any account of normativity has to deal with, and as such, it will not do to raise those issues as a means to refute this account. I have also shown that such an account is not unmotivated. Or, at least, I have tried to show what an overall picture of normativity would have to look like if we are going to have anything like an 'ethics' of belief. In Chapter 2 – 6, I looked at the problems of doxastic voluntarism and consilience failure for the deontological conception. I argued that these two problems are not as independent as may first appear, indeed that the consilience problem emerges out of what I have argued is the most promising line of defence to take with regard to the voluntarism issue. I also argued that the "tolerant pluralism" invoked by Alston, Barnes, and Vahid as a way to defend the deontological conception, whilst dealing with the problem of consilience failure, remains incomplete in that it is open to the problem of how deontological justification remains particularly epistemic. My thesis has thus been an attempt to try to answer how deontology can take this issue on board.

The thesis that there is a unity of justification at the level of obligation is an intuitive one for me, insofar as I have made this claim plausible, this thesis has its success gauged accordingly.

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